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# KILMENY

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

AUTHOR OF 'IN SILK ATTIRE,' 'LOVE OR MARRIAGE?'

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In Three Volumes

VOL. I.

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In einem Thal bei armen Hirten
Erſchien mit jedem jungen Jahr,
Sobald die erſten Lerchen ſchwirrten,
Ein Mädchen ſchön und wunderbar.

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# CONTENTS

OF

# THE FIRST VOLUME.


CHAPTER I

PAGE

My Master . . . . . 1

CHAPTER II.

My Home . . . . . 21

CHAPTER III.

My Uncle Job . . . . . 38

CHAPTER IV.

My Friend . . . . . 68

CHAPTER V.

In Regent's Park . . . . . 99

CHAPTER VI.

The Æsthetic Grotto . . . . . 129

CHAPTER VII.

PAGE

SOME OLD FRIENDS . . . . . 169

CHAPTER VIII.

POLLY'S MOTHER . . . . . 195

CHAPTER IX.

LEWES CASTLE . . . . . 221

CHAPTER X.

POLLY AND HE . . . . . 263

CHAPTER XI.

MR. ALFRED BURNHAM . . . . . [illegible]

CHAPTER XII.

AT SHOREHAM . . . . . 288

# KILMENY.

## CHAPTER I.

### MY MASTER.

I WAS not born to command men. The keen, audacious spirit which plans the building of bridges, lays down great lines of railways, and gets up prodigious companies, was always a mystery to me—a mystery as depressing as the things themselves. I used to be afraid of large mechanical works—used to wonder what sort of men first undertook to raise immense viaducts, drive tunnels through mountains, and plan huge ships. The mere size of a church made me sad. And when I met men who seemed to have splendid, matter-of-

fact strength in their faces—men who had hard, clear, literal views of things—who were on equal terms with the newest enterprises, and were capable of imagining even newer and bigger things, I almost feared them. A tall man overawed me as a big building did. Then the great, rich people, who had such a royal way with them—the men who could stare a beggar out of countenance, who could quite honestly look at a tradesman or a waiter as a sort of divinely-appointed slave, who could do cruel things when the law allowed them, and laugh over the misfortune of their weaker opponent—they, too, were among my mysteries. The world was too big, and strong, and rich, and hard-hearted; and I feared it.

I used to make a world of my own, in which there were no gigantic walls, or gaunt buildings, or lonely squares, with cold iron railings and melancholy trees. It was a

world which I must have borrowed from some theatrical scene; for it only consisted of an Irish lake, surrounded by hills, under moonlight. I used to imagine myself living always by this lake, and listening to the old Irish airs, which seemed somehow to hover round about it, and be its very atmosphere. At night I would lie in a boat, on the still surface, with the moonlight on the sedges and trees; and the melody that always came then—like the lake itself speaking—was, 'Silent, O Moyle, be the sound of thy waters!' Fancy falling asleep to that pathetic wail! Then for the brisk morning breeze and the sunshine—the joyous 'Garryowen' falling into the plaintive minor of 'Shule Aroon.' And somehow that always led on to 'Love's Young Dream'—the old air which no repetition can rob of its exceeding sadness—sad as love's young dream

itself—which is the saddest thing a man meets with on this side of death.

I suppose it all arose from my being physically not the equal of my neighbours. I saw big, strong, handsome men, and they were to me as demigods. Was it not their right that they should have plenty of money, and beautiful wives, and a fine, domineering manner, and a splendid carriage to whirl them homeward to their grand dinners? Notwithstanding my having been born and bred in the heart of an English county, I was small and slight; I was sallow of face; I was hungry-looking; and they used to say that my eyes stared like those of a young crow. Once Big Dick—of whom you will hear more by-and-by—in a kindly mood, begotten of too much beer, said to me—

'Look here, Ted, I'll tell you what you are like. Did you ever snare a rabbit, and take it up before it was dead? Did you

ever catch it by the back of the neck, and look at its wild, frightened, big eyes, that were full of fear and trouble? You always look to me like a caught rabbit, half dead with fright, and like to cry, if you only could. My sister had eyes like you. I wonder if *you* would cry, like her, if you heard pretty tunes? Ted, I think you were meant for a girl.'

I did not tell; but that I used to cry bitterly, in secret, over certain kinds of music—especially some of these Irish airs I have named—was too well known to myself. You must not suppose, however, that this altogether arose from physical weakness. So far as muscular force went, I was strong. I had a broad chest. My arms, rather long, were tough and sinewy. When the fit came across me, I used to torture myself with physical exercise, to get rid of my plethora of nervous strength. I will say nothing of

my having seen a boy, twice as big as myself, beating a little girl one day in High Holborn. I so nearly strangled him that the sight of his face has never been erased from my memory.

I used to have my dreams, of course. I used to imagine myself one of those big, handsome, florid-faced men, with lots of money, with beautiful women my friends, with the power of going whither I pleased, with the delight of having no master. Oh the luxury of lying in bed as long as you might wish! Oh the happiness of walking out in the sunny forenoons—with no fear of coming work—to saunter idly by the grey Serpentine, and watch the blowing of the leaves of the trees! To have no master, and lots of money! But it was not for me—I was too small and insignificant. These things were for the big and proud.

You may ask how such a one should

have a story to tell; and I reply at once that there is nothing heroic of my doing which I shall have to record in these pages. But I have a tenacious memory; life has seemed very various, and, on the whole, very beautiful to me; and I venture to set down some sketch of what I have seen and known, that others may judge whether they see the world with the same eyes. Hence I must beg the reader to regard the following narrative as wholly impersonal; the word 'I' will occur frequently, too frequently; but it will merely represent a lens, and the reader is asked to look at the pictures only. There are some, curious in such matters, who may be inclined to analyse the peculiarities of the lens by watching the distortions they will find in the pictures; they too, I hope, will not be disappointed, if frankness will help.

Now if there was anybody likely to cure

one of mooning and day-dreaming, it was my master. His name was Weavle, but we generally called him Weasel. He was a carver and gilder in High Holborn; and he employed three men and myself. He was in a fair way of business, dealing more with artists than with the general public, and hence it was that I came to know so many artists. His shop adjoined the Royal Oak Yard, and the work-room windows looked into the stone square of the old Royal Oak Inn, into which, every forenoon, the Buckinghamshire omnibus is still driven. How I used to look out of the dingy grey panes, and envy the rosy and happy faces of the people who came in, with the light of the country in their eyes, and the keen breeze painted on their cheeks! How I used to envy the people who got up on that coach, and

were taken away out of the great close town! But, to my master.

Weavle was a short thin man, round-shouldered, with a pale face, a bald head, and small, reddish-grey eyes. He was querulous and captious as an ill-bred and angry woman; he had a shrewish tongue, a diabolical temper, and a nature so indescribably petty and mean that I despair of conveying any notion of it. He walked about in thick, soft slippers, for the express purpose of catching his men in some small delinquency; and then he would stand and scold with a womanly spite and ingenuity of epithet that were wonderful. It was, I believe, the thing dearest to his heart, this angry declamation, in which he exhibited a marvellous power of saying everything that could wound a man's feelings to the quick, and humiliate him before his fellows. He laid traps for the men.

He slid about like a spectre, and watched them with the eyes of a detective. And he never went out of the workshop without turning sharply round, to see if any one were grinning over his washerwoman speeches.

The very keenest pleasure I have in life is this. Sometimes, even at this remote period, I dream for a whole night that I am again under Weavle's domination. I have to submit to the insult of his stealthy footsteps, to the virulence and meanness of his scolding; the old pain and heart-sickening return, the bitterly cold mornings, the dull days, the hopeless labour, the weary struggle against poverty. The daylight breaks, and I fancy that I have to go and submit to that cruel, mean old man. And then, slowly, as if sunshine were filling the room, I begin to have the consciousness that there is no Weavle, that

all the bad time is past, that I am my own master, with my own plenteous time, and my own plenteous money—that I am FREE! It is almost worth while to have had one's heart-blood sucked for years by such a Weasel, to know the intense strong joy which accompanies that conviction.

The man was not always mean and offensive; at night he slept. And if in his dreams he ever saw a company of angels, I know that his first instinctive impulse was to watch them, lest they should be stealing their master's time.

It was this poor little tyrant who first taught me to love the great, generous forces of nature. It was when I thought of him, and of his unutterable pettiness and suspicion, that I grew to know and love the sea, the long swathes of light across the blue, the far-off coast-line and the moving splendours of the clouds.

Even at this moment I cannot bear to look on a river or an estuary. There must be no land on the other side, nothing but the great plain on which the winds come down darkling, or on which the sunlight sleeps still and warm, blurring the horizon-line with a mist of heat. Indeed, the whole bent of my life, physical and mental, has been escape from Weavle. That I am now free I have already hinted, and I propose to tell the story of my release.

Perhaps you ask if my companions regarded Weavle as I did. First let me say a word about them. Big Dick was a man who stood six feet one in his stocking-soles; he had a massive and strong frame, a fine chest, tangled black hair, and a handsome face, flushed by much drinking. His wife was dead. He had a little boy, whom he had handed over to his sister, thus leaving

him free to follow his own courses. And regularly as Saturday came round, so regularly did Dick get drunk; and drunk he continued until the following Wednesday. Then he would come in to his work, his big scarred hand, with its protuberant knuckles, swollen veins, and horny finger-tips, trembling and uncertain, his eyes bleared and lustreless. He was gruff, and would not speak to us then. By Thursday the black-sheep feeling wore off, and he set to work to make up for lost time. He was a splendid workman, and by the Saturday had always amassed as much wages as he wanted for his needs. He was remarkably good-natured, and being 'a rare handy man' was in much request among the neighbours. He could glaze and paint, and hang wall-papers, and work in stucco—in short, he could do everything, and he was always ready to do it as a

neighbourly turn, if you allowed him his necessary liquor. Dick good-humouredly said of his master, that Weasel could not hold his tongue if he tried, and that he did not mean half of what he said. When Dick got into trouble, he bore the rancorous and scurrilous speechifying with resignation, and only gave a sigh of relief when Weasel slipped out.

But you should have heard what Joe Risley had to say about my master. Throughout the trade Joe was known as 'The Royal'—because, on Coronation-day, Joe had dressed himself in a Coronation-coat, and, having got a little tipsy, made a rush forward to the Queen's carriage, in order to shake Her Majesty by the hand. Joe very nearly lost his ear by a dragoon's sword, and was picked up from among the horses' feet with his coat rent in twain. Perhaps it was this circumstance that had made 'The

ticular desire or aim in the world. He was content if he got his work done in good time; and sometimes, but rarely, he took a holiday, which he spent in lying upon Hampstead Heath. He seemed to have no friends; and never went down to Dartford, his native place. His real name was, I think, Taplin or Toplin.

Such were my companions in Weasel's shop; but they were very differently situated from myself. They were men, and independent of other men. They could spend a half-crown without thinking much of it. Above all, they were free to work when they pleased, to be idle when they pleased. If the whim came into their head (that it never did was always a puzzle to me), they could have snapped their fingers in Weasel's face, and gone off to spend a whole day on the banks of the Serpentine, assured that next morning they could get work elsewhere. At

least they could take a holiday; and my notion of a holiday was always associated with the Serpentine. I loved that little bit of water as if it had been the sea. I used to make it a sea by sitting down on one of the benches and shading my eyes so as to hide the opposite bank—so that I could see nothing but the grey rippling water, hear nothing but the wind in the trees overhead; and then I grew almost faint with the dull, dumb joy of being alone by the sea. I forgot the rich people who were riding up and down the Row behind me; I saw none of the poor idling loungers who stood at the end of the lake, and threw crumbs or stones at the ducks. There was nothing before me but the wind-stirred water, and where I could see no more water, I imagined water until it touched the sky. Sometimes I fancied I could hear the sound of waves on the far-off coast: sometimes I fancied I could see, just on the line of the horizon, a faint white

speck of a ship appear, catching a touch of gold from the sunset. The Serpentine is small and insignificant, doubtless; but so is a sea-shell, and the sea-shell, if you are alone, and if you listen closely, will tell you stories of the sea.

As I dreamed there, on certain rare occasions, I grew to think that life, for me, was scarcely worth having. My existence was a blunder. I was not fitted to cope with the forces around me, and wrest from them that alone which would have made life endurable. I had no clear idea of what that was: I only knew that it was unattainable. What lay before me? A life similar to that pursued by my companions in Weasel's shop would have been sufficiently distasteful, even had I had the fine physique and good humour of Big Dick, the keen interest in political affairs of Risley, or even Kent's imperturbable temperament. What was the use of me to

anybody—to myself even? The mere object of keeping one's self alive with nothing to look forward to but the endless round of work, in which one could take no interest, was disheartening in the extreme. Many and many a time I wished that I could compress my whole life into a few moments, and make it useful to some one who would kindly thank me for it. One of those beautiful women, for example, who rode by? Could I not throw away my life at her feet, doing her some slight service, and earn from her the gratitude of a smile? My life was a weariness to myself: could I make it heroic and worthy even for a second, by yielding it to the service of one of those peerless women, who were so far away from me—so cold, and beautiful, and distant?

As I sit here, thinking of that old, sad, ridiculous time, some one looks over my shoulder, and reads these words, and laughs.

## CHAPTER II.

### MY HOME.

It was the month of primroses; and the wind blew fresh and mellow with the promise of the summer. Even in the London streets there was a strange sweetness in the air, and a new, keen light in the sky. And on that morning, when I was free to go home for a whole couple of days, the spring seemed to have taken a clear leap ahead, and got into a fine breezy summer warmth. As I made my way to the Great Western Railway Station, the grey dawn broke into a pale saffron, and the light lay along the tall, silent houses and their rows of windows. Beautiful houses

they were—up by Park Lane, and Connaught Place, and Eastbourne Terrace—but I was no longer oppressed by them or by the grand people who lived in them. I snapped my fingers at the closed white shutters and the lowered green blinds. I laughed aloud in the empty streets, to the amazement of solitary policemen. I skipped, and hopped, and tried to jump impossible jumps; so that I reached the station half an hour too soon, and speedily got sobered down by the melancholy gloom of the place, and the official gravity of the porters.

But then again, as the train got out and away from London—leaving Holland Park and its tall houses pale and silvery in the east—and we were among the warm bright meadows and fields—with the sunlight shimmering over the young green of the trees—with the sweet, pure, spring wind rushing through the open windows of the

carriage—with the joyous motion of the train, and the thought of utter, unrestrained freedom and pleasure for two entire long days—was it possible that I should feel unkindly to any man or place? I blessed London—after Notting Hill was long out of sight. I began to think 'Kent' almost an enlivening sort of person, and very nearly forgave Weasel.

There were to be grand doings at Burnham House, and at Burnham, the little village down in the heart of Bucks, where my father and mother lived. Miss Hester Burnham, the last of that long line which had given several prominent names to English history—particularly during the great King-and-Parliament struggle—had just come home from France to live in England. My father was head-keeper at Burnham—a man who ought to have been born in feudal times; and it was somehow his notion of

what was right and proper that I, though having nothing to do with Burnham, ought to be there when this important event came off. Fain would I have gone down on the top of the coach that daily leaves Holborn for these quiet Buckinghamshire parts, and done the journey in the old picturesque fashion; but I should have reached Burnham too late in the evening; and so I had to take rail to Wycombe, and walk across to that little village which has been for centuries a sort of appanage to Burnham House.

I had very little interest either in Miss Hester Burnham, or in the doings that were to celebrate her return. I remembered her only as a little girl, with dark hair and staring eyes, who used to ride about on a white pony, and was greatly petted by the farmers and their wives—indeed, by everybody. Doubtless, Miss Hester was now a fine lady, come home from France to set up her

state in the great old house, where her people had lived for centuries. Indeed, so little did I think of the whole matter, that I forgot that Miss Hester could scarcely be sixteen years of age.

So it was that, when I reached Wycombe, instead of walking straight over to Burnham, I set forth on a ramble across the long chalk hills and through the dense beech-woods which were once so familiar to me.

How well I knew every house, and orchard, and field, as the road gradually rose and brought into view the deep and pleasant valleys, that were now so green and warm. Night after night, in my poor London lodgings, I had lain with open eyes and dreamed of these woods, and hills, and hollows; and lo! here they were—not as I had imagined them — but under the bewildering glare of the spring light.

Yet the day was not one of strong sun-

shine. There was a thin, transparent yellow mist, that did not so much obscure the sunlight as conceal the directness of its rays; and while you could not turn to any point of the sky and say the sun was there, you felt that it was all around you, shining in the intense pellucid green of the young hawthorn leaves and causing the breaks in the distant chalk-hills to gleam like silver. Then all the wonders of the spring were out—the rich-coloured japonica in front of the labourers' cottages, the white masses of petals on the great pear-trees, the big flowers of the cherries, and the rose-tinted scarcely unfolded apple-blossom, sprinkled here and there with little bunches of woolly leaves. Here, too, were all the spring flowers about the hedges and banks; and the spring freshness and brilliancy upon the young leaves of the chestnuts, and the elms, and the ash. The limes were black yet; the

tall and graceful birch had only a tinge of green on its drooping branches; and the interminable beech-woods—the glory of Buckinghamshire in the time when they grow red, and orange, and crimson—showed as yet only a dull purple, caught from the ruddy and twisted buds. And over all these things brooded the warmth of that pale yellow light—so calm, and still, and silent, but for the pearly music of a lark that was lost in it; and the woods, also, and the long low valleys, seemed to be hushed into a drowsy silence, broken now and again by the clear, strong piping of a thrush in one of the blossom-laden orchards. It was all so different from London.

Through these beech-woods, strewn with dead leaves, and matted with briar and breckan, I joyously went until I issued upon the summit of the hill, upon the steep side of which is cut the great white cross that

can be seen all the way from Oxford. The old grand picture of that immense intervening plain was once more before me. Princes Risborough, with its red-tiled houses and its church lying down there under the faint blue smoke of the village; the long white road leading on to Bledlow; the comfortable farmsteads smothered among orchards; then the great patchwork of fields with their various colours—the red and brown fallow, the dark green of the young clover, the fine tint of the wheat, here and there already yellowed with charlock; the sharp, black lines of the hedges gradually getting closer and fainter as the eye rose to the horizon, and there becoming a confused mass of misty streaks; on the right the remote uplands, with their larch-plantations, and here and there a white house shining in the sun; down on the left the continuing line of the chalk hills, rounded and smooth

where they became visible from among the dusky stretches of the beech-woods; and far on in front, half lost in the shimmer of light along the edge of the sky, the pale blue plain of Oxfordshire, indeterminate and vague.

How long I lay on the shoulder of Whitecross Hill, with the dazzling glare of the concealed sun lying warm and crimson on my shut eyelids, I cannot say. I was outside of all distressing conditions—absolutely free, and without a thought for anything or anybody, including myself. It was enough to be in the fresh and beautiful air, to be alone, to be able to dream. And it seemed to me, as I lay there, that there were fairies hovering over me, and that the warm spring air, blowing over my face, was only their tickling my forehead with their small handkerchiefs. Or was it with spikes of feather-grass? I lay and pictured their walking

round me in all sorts of picturesque and shining costumes—the small gentlemen with helmets of acorn-cups, and shields made out of the shell of the green beetle; the small ladies with parasols formed out of a curved rose-leaf and bonnets of white larkspur. Then, somehow, a thought of Weasel intervened; I got up angrily, and made to go down the hill and get back to Burnham.

I then found that a pair of new boots I had put on that morning—assisted, doubtless by the mad jumping and hopping of my progress to the station—had severely hurt my feet. Indeed, when I reached the foot of White-cross Hill, I found it impossible to put one foot to the ground, so intense was the pain which the pressure caused. Under the circumstances, I took the only course open to me—sat down, pulled off my boots and stockings, put the latter in the former, and, slinging the whole over my shoulder,

prepared to walk bare-footed until I should near Burnham. Perhaps by that time I might be able to pull my boots on again; if not—and the chances were against it—I should have to put a bold face on the matter and walk with absurdly white feet up to my mother's door.

But, as I yet rested, I heard a pattering of horses' hoofs, and, looking around, saw a couple of riders coming along the white road. The glare of the light was in my eyes; but I could make out that the one was a young girl, the other a youngish gentleman, though considerably older than she. It struck me at the moment that very likely this would be Miss Burnham; and so I sat still, that I might see her well as she passed. Besides there has always seemed to me something very fine, and stately, and beautiful in the position of a woman (who can ride at all decently) on horseback, and

in these days lady-riders wore long skirts, which greatly added to the effect of their appearance. So they came cantering along the dusty road; and just before they reached me, the light was so altered that I could distinctly see them.

My first thought was, 'How quickly girls grow in France!'

My second, 'What a sweet face!'

Pale it was, and dark (at least it seemed dark in shadow), scarcely surrounded by loose masses of brown hair that the wind had blown back from her hat. You could not tell what the features were, for the wonderful eyes of the face caught you and kept you there. As she swept past, she drove a single glance right through me; and I thought that I had seen a vision of all the sweetness and gracious kindliness of womanhood revealed by this one swift look. Here, at least, was a gentlewoman in nature, one who was not super-

cilious, or cursed by conventional pride. I looked after her, and I said to myself, 'There, now, if you could do any service to one such as she is, life would not be quite worthless.'

Then I saw her, before she had gone twenty yards, pull up her horse. Her companion, a young man of about twenty-two, fair-haired, apparently tall, and with cold grey eyes, followed her example.

She said something to him—he shrugged his shoulders—and, as well as I could hear, said he had no coppers.

'Give me silver, then!' she said, with a sort of girlish petulance; and then he handed something to her.

She wheeled round her horse and rode up to where I sat. I could not understand all this. She held out her hand. I rose, expecting her to say something. She still held out her hand, and I, reaching up mine, received into it a half-crown. Still I stood, stupified,

wondering what the beautiful blue-grey eyes, under those long black eye-lashes, meant; and then, before I had recovered myself, and without a word, she turned her horse again and rode away.

It was all the work of a second; and for some little time I was too bewildered to know what had occurred. At last, when I saw the white half-crown lie in my hand, a sensation which I shall never forget came over me —a sensation of consuming, intolerable shame, and of bitter and envious hatred. This was what the kindliness of her eyes meant, that I was a beggar and she pitied me. I felt my face grow white and cold, and then burn red with confusion and rage; while the uncontrollable hate with which I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of the two people on the road—with which I wondered whether I could not even yet overtake them, and hurl their money at them, with mad imprecations

—made my whole frame shake and quiver. To have alms thrown to me by the wayside, to be treated as a common beggar—the very thought of it seemed to crush me with a deadening, burning weight, that was scarcely relieved by wild anticipations of revenge. For this insult there should be insult. Was not my mother a gentlewoman, too; although only the daughter of a poor clergyman, when my father, then a young gardener, got so madly in love with her that even his notions of duty were unable to prevent his running away with her? And was not his careful and respectful behaviour to her—now that they had been married something like eighteen years—a wonder to the neighbours, and a greater wonder to my mother's old friends, who had prophesied the usual consequences for her folly? Nay, had not the Burnhams been always tenderly considerate to my mother, though she was only the wife of

their head-keeper; and who was it that taught this very Miss Hester the little accomplishments of a gentlewoman before she went to her Parisian schools? These things, and others, I thought over; but the accursed white half-crown lay out in the middle of the road, whither it had rolled after I flung it violently to the ground; and the mere sight of it seemed to make my eyes burn.

I noticed a bird fluttering in an unusual manner in the hedge opposite. Anything was a distraction just then. I went over, and found that a blackbird had been caught in a small horse-hair snare, fastened by a peg into the ground. I grasped the bird. It struck its bill into my finger, and the blood jumped to the skin. I pulled it, the snare, peg, and all through the whitethorn hedge, and tore my hand with the thorns as I did so.

'Now,' I said, with my teeth clenched—

for I was beside myself, and knew no more what I said than what I did—'I will tear this bird into inches, wing by wing, and leg by leg.'

I looked at its frightened eyes, its half-opened yellow bill, and glossy back; then I threw it into the air, and sat down, and burst into bitter and angry tears.

## CHAPTER III.

### MY UNCLE JOB.

THE broad grey front of Burnham House has stood these couple of hundred years and more at the head of one of the finest avenues in England—an avenue about a mile and a half in length, and at least three hundred yards broad, leading up from the valley in a straight line to the building on the top of the hill. Many a goodly company has cantered up and down that splendid ride, with its dense, mossy, close, green turf, its patches of furze and broom and breckan. On either side stands a row of magnificent Spanish chestnuts; on the one hand skirting the woods that slope down to the Amer-

sham-road, on the other forming the boundary-line of Burnham Park. The House itself, fronting this spacious avenue, commands the broad valley that stretches for miles eastward; and from almost any point around you can see from afar the grey frontage of the old building, gleaming like gold in the sunshine, high up there among the trees. Just outside what is called the 'ladies' garden' stands the little, old church, whose walls are covered with marble memorials of the Burnhams; and from thence a narrow road, dividing the park, leads across the summit of the hill to Burnham village and Burnham Common. The place, with all its historical associations of the times of the Civil War, is little known by Englishmen; but it is familiar to Americans, and Frenchmen visit it, and Germans write about it; and in St. Petersburg you can buy photographs of Burnham, and Burnham Church,

and of the monumental stone erected to John Burnham, the friend and colleague of Cromwell.

Before coming near Burnham I cooled my feet in a small stream that runs along the valley, and managed to pull on my boots again. The pain of walking was intense; but I did not mind it so much now. When I got to the lodge, I went in and borrowed a spade from the lodge-keeper.

'Why. I bain't a wolf, Mahster Ives,' said he; 'you needn't speak to a mahn as if he wur a wolf.'

'I didn't mean to be uncivil,' I said.

'It wur only my fun,' he said, bringing the spade; 'but you do look a bit vexed and hout o' sorts.'

That I might not be seen by any of the people who were now at the House, I passed into the wood by the side of the avenue, and made my way through the thick under-

growth to a deep cleft or dell in which [redacted] children, who had the *entrée* to the woods of Burnham, used to play. We had had a notion of getting up some kind of grotto there, and a large number of big stones were still strewn about the edge of the wooded pit. The biggest of these I placed on my shoulder; and then made my way down through the tangled briar and bushes to the bottom of the dell. There I dug a hole about a foot square and a foot deep. I flung the half-crown into the hole—I think I struck at it with the spade in impotent rage—and, covering it up, put the big stone over the place.

'That is the first alms I ever had offered me,' I said aloud—and my voice had a strange sound in the dell—'and that is what I did with it.'

I took the spade back to the lodge-keeper.

'Why, Master Ted,' said he, 'you look as if you'd gone and buried your sour looks. You be younger and brighter by a dozen years than you wur when you axed me for the spaäd. And it's a good spaäd, too.'

'It's a capital spade,' I said. 'Did Miss Burnham pass up to the House lately?'

'Yaäs, she did.'

'On horseback, with some one with her?'

'Yaäs.'

'Who was he?'

'That be a son o' Colonel Burnham's—Mr. Alfred—and he be a divvle to curse and swear, he be.'

'I suppose he means to marry Miss Burnham?'

'Lor' bless ye, there wun't be thoughts o' marryin in her 'ed for yurs yet. And when she do marry she'll marry a properer mahn than *'im*. I bain't much of a weather-wise mysel', but I doan't think much o' that ere

'errin' gutted young feller. He's bin to college, I reckon, and learnt to play cahrds, and swear at ye as if ye wur a deäd stoat.'

I saw that old Joshua Tubb knew very little about Mr. Alfred Burnham, but that he was inclined to guess the worst, probably by reason of his having suffered a little of the young gentleman's strong language.

'He's living up at the House, I suppose?'

'Yaäs, and his father, and lots mower on 'em. The old plaäce begins to look live-like now.'

I went up by the side of the avenue to cross over to Burnham, keeping out of the way of the house. It seemed to me just then that all the hateful influences I feared and loathed were within that gaunt grey building; and that it also held the first human being who had ever thought so meanly of me as to make me a beggar. If you consider that it was at the very moment

when I was rejoicing in my freedom from that sense of constraint and inferiority which the town pressed down upon me, that she appeared and again brought home to me the immeasurable distance that lay between my insignificance and helplessness and the beautiful independence, and strength, and power of the rich and lovely, you will understand how I felt towards her. I had begun to forget what I was: she came, and seemed to say—

'You have no right to rejoice in the free air and the light. You must not imagine yourself equal with other people, even by forgetting their existence.'

I am too conscious how feebly and imperfectly these pages that I have written express the one constant and bitter feeling that was always with me at this time. As I look at them myself, they seem to tell me that at the time of which I speak I was the

victim of a morbid vanity—angry with my own position, and envious of the position of others. If such be the impression produced upon any other, then the words entirely mislead. So far from being envious, or jealous, or vain, my torment was my knowledge of my own worthlessness and insignificance. I did not envy the rich and powerful; for I was too much impressed by the easy assumption with which they wore their honours. I never dreamed of daring to question their right to have these fine things: the present fact that they had them was a sufficient and most imposing authority. All this may have been sufficiently morbid and paltry, but it was not the result of envy.

When I reached the small cottage, fronting Burnham Common, in which I was born, I found my mother training some creeper up the outside wall, around the window;

while my father stood by, waiting upon her and assisting her as he could. They were very unlike—he a tall, brown, sun-tanned keeper, with a hook nose, grey eyes, scant whiskers, and ruddy hair; she a small, tender, black-eyed woman, who had at one time been very good-looking, and who even now was pretty, and neat, and engaging. This little, sensitive woman, who never spoke a harsh word to anybody, who could not even scold an unruly dog, had this big man her absolute slave. I think he was fonder of her then than when he persuaded her to run away from her father's home with him. Naturally, he was rather overbearing in his manner—at least he was extremely practical in his aims, very plain-spoken, and inclined to regard everybody who did not agree with him as more or less of a fool; and yet with her you could see that he was almost studiously courteous, and gentle, and tender.

Even his manner towards myself I attributed in part to the notion he had somehow got of my mother and myself being of a different race from his own — or being somehow superior to the people round about. It was this feeling, I imagine, that induced him to send me to London, when the situation in Weasel's place was offered, rather than allow me to grow up to the ordinary routine of farm work.

After the customary greetings and enquiries, I went inside to get a pair of slippers; and sat down in our little front room, which looked out on a bit of garden and on the common. By this time the sunlight had so far dispersed the faint swathes of mist as to show along the sky a strong glow of pale gold, streaked across with bands of cirrous clouds which gleamed white and silvery in the warm yellow light. Burnham village is very pretty and picturesque in its high-lying posi-

tion; its few scattered cottages and gardens fronting the undulations of the furze-covered common, and looking towards a long stretch of woodland beyond, which encloses the small colony and shelters it from the wind. I was gazing out from the shadow of the room upon this secluded little place—so warm and silent under the heat and light—and was relapsing into the old feeling of dreamy contentment, when a sudden apparition awoke the bitterness and shame I had experienced in the morning. Miss Hester Burnham walked up to the little green gate, and entered our front garden. She came forward, with the sunlight and a smile on her face, to shake hands with my mother; and, but for the difference in dress, I think you could have taken them for mother and daughter. I was too exasperated and ashamed to pay attention to such things; but I can look back and see that at this

moment, standing in the sunlight of the garden, she must have been exceedingly pretty. The slight and girlish figure was small and delicate, exquisitely proportioned, and gracious and graceful in every motion. Her eyes seemed to be darker that my mother's eyes; but they were not. They were of a soft grayish blue, quiet and tender in expression; but what made them dark in appearance was the long and almost black eyelashes which deepened their meaning and added singularly to the beauty of her profile. Then her eyebrows were high, finely curved, and black; and a profusion of dark hair fell about the rather pale face, and down on the white small neck and the delicate small shoulders. As for her features—you could not see them for looking at her eyes. They may have been regular, irregular—anything: all you could distinctly say was that there appeared a singular light and life about

them, with an occasional touch of gravity which was beyond the girl's years. The eyes seemed to have too much sympathy in them for one so young; and yet in their wise truthfulness you could see there was no trace of affected interest. I can remember how she looked into my mother's face, with those tender, thoughtful, and beautiful eyes. I can remember, too, that she was dressed very neatly—in a tight-fitting slate-grey costume, that had lines of white about it, and just a touch of scarlet ribbon near the neck. She wore a small grey hat with a single gleaming red feather in it; I think she had a riding-whip in her hand; and she had a sprig of crimson heath in her bosom.

'Mrs. Ives,' she said—and her voice had the soft, contralto mellowness that made my mother's voice so tender and pleasant—'I must trouble you again; I really think you must let me coax you to live at the

House altogether. I very, very much want you to come now and help me among all those tiresome people. Can you come at once?'

'Certainly, Miss Hester.'

'Then I suppose I must go in and wait until you're ready?' she said, with a sort of girlish impatience that made my mother smile.

'No, Miss Hester, you need not wait; I will be over at the House in a few minutes.'

'Then I *will* wait. You see how you have spoilt me with your kindness; and so —and so——'

I heard her come into the passage; and I rose.

'My son is within,' said my mother.

'Oh, that's Ted,' I heard her say, 'who used to be my great friend, and my cham-

pion when I got into trouble with old Joshua. Is he in here?'

The door was opened, and she advanced a single step. I saw the peculiar, frightened glance she directed towards me: then her face grew scarlet, and for a moment she stood in direful confusion. For myself, I said nothing, and did nothing; but my blood was up in rebellion, I knew.

Then, with a wonderful graciousness and the frankest of smiles—I could not help admiring the ease with which her fashionable education enabled her to extricate herself from this embarrassment—she came forward, and held out her hand, and said—

'May I beg you to forgive me?'

I said, coldly enough perhaps—

'I have nothing to forgive.'

Her eyes met mine for a moment; and I knew that her woman's wit—wonderfully

ingénious even in a girl like that—was wrestling with all the circumstances of the case. Then (all this had happened in a moment, and her hand was still extended), she said in a low voice that was intended not to let my mother hear—

'I will take it back; and then I will ask you to forgive me. It was a mistake—I am very, very sorry.'

Then it flashed upon me that I could not give her back that accursed piece of money which was lying buried down in the dell; and I knew she would fancy that I had accepted the alms—that I had already spent the money. The horror and agony of that one moment was worse than all that had gone before. If there was one thing I was proud of it was my pride. It was my only possession: I had need to preserve it. And now the only creature belonging to those gifted people who held the world in their

hand who had ever descended so far as to speak to me (and in the old days to be a sort of patronising little friend to me) had offered me alms, and she would imagine that I had sold my birthright of independence for this wretched bit of money.

'I—I have not got it—I cannot give it to you,' I stammered; and then, half-conscious of the wonder and astonishment of her eyes, I went past her, and out of the room, and out of the house.

I went out into the cool air of the afternoon, feeling that I had the brand of Cain on my forehead. Was I not a convicted pauper? I walked away from Burnham, over the park, into the stripe of wood by the avenue, and down into that dell. The stone was still there. My first impulse was to dig up the half-crown again, and take it to her, and throw it at her feet; but how could I make the explanation? No; it

should remain there; and she might think of it all just as she liked.

At that moment I heard voices above—of two men who were walking along the avenue. I heard some snatch of conversation like this:

—— 'Not much, certainly. But there is the house and grounds—a fortune in themselves.'

'You would not sell them?'

'I would, if I had the chance.'

'Then I suppose, you'd send that poor little girl adrift, and spend her money on Clara Beauchamp. Well, Alfred, you have got a wonderful decision about you, to put it mildly.'

'Clara is a devilish fine girl; though she ought to have taken some other name than Beauchamp when she started on her career. As for my cousin Hester, you know I shall be compelled to get money somewhere, and

she has got such a d——d smooth temper, she would stand anything——'

That was all I heard: but it was enough to suggest many things. And the most probable theory of the aim of this conversation which I was forced to hear, was so mean and repulsive and depraved that, at the time, it delighted me. These grand people, then, were occasionally in straits like others. They were not immaculate, either. They had their meannesses—perhaps more absolutely gross and mean than was possible with lesser people in lesser circumstances. To be looked upon as a beggar was bad enough; but there were more despicable beings in the world than beggars.

When I got out of the dell, and looked up the avenue, I saw that one of the two men who had been speaking was the gentleman who had been riding with Miss Hester in the

morning. Then I turned my back upon Burnham House; and hoped that I might never see it again.

I walked over to my uncle Job's farm—some two miles off; and there I spent the evening and the whole of the next day. This Uncle Job was my father's elder brother—an old bachelor who had, by rigid parsimony, worked his way up to the tenanting of a farm of over 200 acres. Many things contributed to make him a sort of outcast from among his neighbours. To begin with, he went about in a frightfully unshaven and ragged condition, with an old, smashed, and sun-tanned hat, a wisp of dirty black silk tied round his neck, no collar, an old and shabby coat, and a pair of tight and dirty corduroy breeches; while his unwashed and unshaven face was ornamented with a curiously large grey moustache, which was ordinarily besprinkled with snuff.

He smoked a short clay pipe, and puffed out all manner of socialist and revolutionary speeches along with the smoke. He never went to church. He had been the friend of a God-forgotten major who used to dwell in a lonely house near Crutchett's Coppice, and who was supposed to be a monster of wickedness, and to have murdered his wife. It was found at his death that the major had provided that he should be buried in the neighbouring wood, instead of in consecrated ground: was not this sufficient proof that the devil was sure of his prey? My uncle Job was left as perpetual guardian of the Major's house; and that had now fallen pretty much into ruin, because, as everybody knew it was haunted, nobody would live in it. The experiment was tried once; and the people were glad to get away. In the dark of an evening, the noise of carriage-wheels was often heard without—on the carriage-

drive and at the hall door: when the occupants of the house went to the window nothing was visible. Loud laughter, coming from the neighbouring wood, used to startle the people at dead of night; when they opened a door suddenly, a sort of scuffle was heard, and sometimes the faint echo of a laugh a minute afterwards. But the climax of these visitations was that the owner of the house, going home one night, distinctly saw a grey dog-cart, with a white horse, standing opposite his door-steps. He went forward: as he approached, it faded away, and he walked right through it. That same night no one in the house could sleep for the shrieks of laughter heard all round the place. Next morning the man left, with all his family; and nobody had ventured to sleep in the house since.

Uncle Job was very unwilling to speak of these matters. He growled in his bitter

way at the superstition and folly of the people around; but he would never say distinctly what the occupant of the Major's house had told him when he left.

'Darn the fools,' he used to say, sitting at his fire of a night, with the small black pipe in his mouth; 'they'd believe anything if the pahrson 'ud only tell it them. But the pahrsons are too lazy now-a-days to invent new stories—they stick to the hold ones, Ted. They keep to the hold stories, and they've shot the dower agin the new ones. They be rare fond o' tellin ye o' the plagues o' Egypt, but what I says is, Why didn't Moses try the Egyptians wi' a plague o' pahrsons?—that's what I say. And that's a rare good un', too, about the sun standin' still. Bah! It's my opinion that if the sun stood still, it was because it was so darned astonished at Joshua's cheek in askin' it.'

I think there can be no doubt about my uncle Job having been a frightful old ruffian. But the cool way in which he disposed of his respectable neighbours, and maintained the independence of his position, was fine in its way. I walked over his farm the next morning with him. Job had his small pipe in his mouth, and his hat drawn over his forehead to shelter his eyes from the sunlight.

'The pahrson doan't come to my shop,' he said; 'I doan't go to his. I be as good a mahn as he—I be. No, I doan't say as goin' to church is a bahd thing, but there's a rare lot o' hypocrites as goes, and what I say is as it's better not to go unless you can hact up to it—that's what I saäy. They go to church, and talk o' the blessin' o' bein' poor, and try to make one another believe as they believes it; but it's my opinion as bein' rich isn't so much of a curse arter all; and I

doan't see as they throw any o' their money into the sea, or much of it into the poor-box, for the matter o' that. Yes, they talk o' bein' poor, and yet they want to farm their two thousand and their three thousand acres, and keep a lot o' families starvin' as ain't got a bit o' land to work on. It's one mahn eatin' up the livin's o' eight or ten—that's what it is, Mahster Ted. What I say is, every mahn should ha' an acre—a mahn an acre—then there 'ud be no starvation or Unions.'

'Why do you farm two hundred acres yourself, Uncle Job?' said I.

'What 'ud be the use o' me givin' up my patch o' ground? what could a mahn get wi' his spade out o' an acre o' this darned stuff? Now, lookee there, Mahster Ted—look at that divvelish little dell as I ploughed for the first time last spring.'

We were now on the brow of a hill,

above the long valley in which the straggling village of Missenden, with its red brick houses and its pale blue smoke lay under the early morning sunshine. And right in front of us, at the other end of the valley, rose the great avenue that led up to Burnham, and the House stood soft and shadowy there among the blue mist of the trees, with a flush of pale yellow across its frontage, caught from the glow of the east. Job paused on the edge of a deep hollow at one end of this field, and blinked at the sunshine, and puffed his pipe, and said—

'As I was a ploughin' theär, I turned over cannon-bullets as was fired all across that valley from Burnham House by Holiver Cromwell.'

I asked Job how he knew that the cannon-balls had belonged to Cromwell, but I was aware that the people living in this district attribute all historical relics to the

time of the Civil War. There seems to have been in history an absolute blank, so far as the Missenden valley is concerned, between that time and this; the people speak of 1640-50 as of yesterday, and there is scarcely a stone or tree in the parish that has not somehow been mixed up in the great struggle between the King and the Commons.

'How do I know?' said my uncle. 'Who ever came into this part of the world to fire bullets except him? Ah! those wur grand times, when gentlemen knew what wur expected of gentlemen, and went out and fought for the poor people as was being taxed. They're talkin' in the newspapers, as I hear, o' spirit-rappin', and all that darned stuff, and it's my opinion that the pahrsons are only humbuggin' us about the joy o' goin' to 'eaven, if we're to be sent to attend on a lot 'o darned old women, and

play accordions for them. But what I say is, if it wur possible for ghosts to come back, what d'ye think, Mahster Ted, 'ud Ireton, and Cromwell, and Blake, and Burnham—to say nothing o' them as wur on the other side — think of our fine gentlemen now, ruinin' themselves and their families wi' horse-racin', fightin' in theatres, gamblin' wi' blasted furreigners in Germany, and the like? Look at the House there—isn't it as fine a house as any in England? And them as has had it—bah!—and him as is goin' to have it——'

'Who is that?' I asked.

'Why, I bain't a prophet, be I, when I say as I know Mahster Alfred Burnham ain't got a darned farthing, and that his father has plenty to get beaver * for, let alone him; and when I sees him ridin about day arter day with Miss Hester, and looking so particlar

* *Beaver*—food.

attentive, I don't need to be Eliza—Elijah I mean—to say as there's somethin' hup. Well, she ain't got much money either, as I can hear on; but he'll get a rare good sum for the old 'Ouse. I dunnow if he can sell the church, too. It wur a pity if he couldn't make some use o' them vallyble bits o' marble as have all the Burnham's names on 'em.'

'You don't think he would sell these, do you?' I asked.

But at this moment the bell of Missenden church—high up on the hill there, above the grey old abbey, and the small river, and the broad meadows—began to toll.

'Darn them bells!' said Uncle Job, turning away testily, 'let's go round to the other side of the hill; and get out of the way o' their noise. I hate 'em. They 'mind me of a funeral; and they say to me as the people who go to church are so darned respectable,

and solemn, and proper; and they tell me what yur respectable people think of me—and that is that I am a flamin' old cuss, who ought to go and bury myself, because I doan't shine my boots, and go and snivvle in a church-pew, and promise to obey all the ten commahndments, and ten mower, if Providence 'll only make me better off than my neighbours.'

I don't think old Job Ives was a very profitable companion, as he went about on a quiet Sunday morning, down in this Buckinghamshire vale, railing and cursing against his kind. However, I hated Burnham, and I remained at my uncle's farm all day, creeping over to bid good-bye to my father and mother after dusk, when no one from Burnham House could see.

## CHAPTER IV.

### MY FRIEND.

I RETURNED to London, and to Weasel's shop, with a great purpose in my heart. I was determined to be Correggio, or Isaac Newton, or Edmund Kean—anybody of such transcendent genius as should make the world pause and wonder. It was not alone the small world of Burnham that I wished to conquer, but that greater world which had cast me down and made a beggar of me. I should be even with it; and, if I spent my life in the struggle, would in the end force it to recognise in me its equal. What were the means? An astounding audacity, assumed for the purpose; backed by a resolu-

tion to explore all the various branches of human knowledge. There was nothing I did not attempt. Greek was my first effort; though I begin to perceive now that life is not long enough to let a man learn Greek. French, and a little German, my mother had taught me; and, while I still coached myself up in these languages, I took to the indiscriminate study of everything. I had no master, or instructor, or guide. I gathered up pence, and bought second-hand books in Holborn. I began to fancy myself learned in hydraulics, and could turn you off at a moment's notice the proper angle for a sluice-gate. I regarded myself as profound in chemistry; and only wanted some apparatus to increase considerably the list of non-metallic elements. I studied astronomy; and knew that, with the requisite time and instruments, I should have discovered Neptune. I studied botany (theoretically, alas!), and had my own notions

about the protoplasmic movement and origin of life. For amusement, I drew, and dabbled in water-colours. I made the absurdest efforts to excel in all these things, that I might wipe out, some day or other, the corrosive stain that Hester Burnham's silver coin had left upon my hand.

I pass over all this foolish time, and arrive at a period when a little further knowledge had cooled my hopes, if not my impatience and desire. My great and faithful friend, now as then, was an artist to whom I had occasionally to carry home picture-frames. He and I somehow became acquainted: he took a sort of fancy to me; and I used to spend all my brief snatches of leisure in his studio in Granby Street, Hampstead Road. His name was Owen Heatherleigh; and I thought at first that he had no friends or relations. I discovered afterwards that he had plenty of both; but he went near them

rarely. He was a man getting on towards thirty, with rough unkempt hair and beard, a broad, honest, powerful face, with a gash upon one cheek which he had received while studying in Germany; large, brown eyes, a good, handsome figure, and slovenly dress. His story, as I heard it from himself, bit by bit, was a peculiar and sad one. He was of very good family: his father was a squire in some remote district of Westmoreland; and, some ten years before I knew him, Owen had the misfortune to fall in love with a young girl, the daughter of the village schoolmaster. His parents would hear nothing of the match. But the girl loved him; and he had just come home from a German University, full of ambition and independence and the fine feeling of youth. He left his father's house, and never set foot in it again.

'I used to go and see her every morning, from my lodgings,' he said, one night to me,

as he sat before the fire, 'and they had a little room prepared for me, in which I used to work at my water-colour sketches, that were, of course, to make a fortune for us both. You know what I am, Ted: what I think about many things. One day I went up to the window of the cottage: it was open—summer-time, you know. She was singing—it was an old, poor piano—but my little girl had the tenderest voice. She was singing some religious hymn or other; and I caught the words, 'Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee,' uttered with such a pathetic abandonment that I dared not enter the house. I felt like a murderer who had wandered near a village church, and heard the people singing. I stood outside and asked myself if I could destroy that beautiful, simple faith of hers. If she were to marry me, would she not either break her heart over my condition; or could I, on the other hand, crush

out all the tenderest and holiest aspirations of her sweet young life, and leave her the prey of doubt and despair? Still she sang, and you might have imagined that the angels themselves were listening to her. I hurried away from the place as if I had been an evil spirit; and—God forgive me! but—I fled here to London. I think it was not more than three months after then that my darling died; and when I went down there, I went into the churchyard and saw the flowers on her grave. She died without ever knowing how wholly and perfectly I loved her, or what it was that had caused me to leave her. Some half-hour before her death, she asked for her prayer-book—there was a primrose in it, you know: that was all . . . . I never kissed her.'

Such was his story.

At another time he told me why he was so lazy—he who could gain reputation and

money by every half-hour of work he chose to expend.

'I came up to London again, resolved to make my own way, and be equal with the people who had cut me on poor Hettie's account——'

'Was her name Hester?' I asked, with a sudden accession of interest.

'Yes. But I found it was no use. What was the good of working yourself to death to amass money, when you found yourself baffled even in the poor competition for the honour that money can give you, by people who never worked a stroke in their life? They had all the chances on their side; I had none. Had I made a lot of money, I should still have been looked on in society as a poor devil of an artist—a man who had to earn his bread—whom one might patronise—who was your servant when you paid him. I gave up the fight,' he continued;

recovering his gaiety of tone, 'I take my ease. I have educated myself into tastes that are easily gratified. I like beer better than all other drinks. I prefer a pipe to any cigar you can give me. I work as little as I can. I have a fine constitution, and am content to enjoy laziness. I lead, on the whole, a remarkably jolly life. As we used to say over in Heidelberg—

Ein starkes Bier, ein beizender Tabak,
Und eine Magd in Putz, das ist nun mein Geschmack.'

'You have the beer and the tobacco; but I don't see the well-dressed girl,' I remarked.

'Not when Polly Whistler comes to look us up?' he said.

But if there was any girl in the world whom it was unlikely Owen Heatherleigh would care about, it was Polly Whistler—the strapping, frank, good-natured

model, who had a tongue as keen as her wit, and a heart as soft as her big black eyes. Polly was a very respectable girl, be it understood. She only sat to two or three artists whom she knew, and who were known to each other; and she was a good deal more scrupulous about her costume than many ladies who would have regarded her with anger and disdain. Sometimes I used to think that Polly cared more about Owen Heatherleigh than he suspected, or than she chose to show; but then again the suspicion was dispelled by the open manner in which she 'chaffed' him about his misogynist habits, and suggested that if she were his wife, she would improve both his chambers and himself.

I remember walking up with him one evening to his studio; he had been insisting on my going to live with him, help him in his work, and share the profits. The mere

suggestion of such a thing set my head spinning with wild anticipations; and I eagerly went to his lodgings to talk the project over.

When we entered the large room, we found the lamp already lit—throwing a dull light on a great, gloomy screen, on the various sketches and pictures hung around the walls, on the littered and dirty apartment, and on a row of dusty and sepulchral plaster busts set along a high shelf. Polly was seated by the fire.

'Well, Polly, are you here?' he said unconcernedly taking another seat.

'Yes,' she said, turning her bright, frank face to us with a smile; 'my old woman went out to a concert with one of her neighbours, and I didn't care about sitting in the house alone.'

'Quite right too. Sitting alone begets gloomy fancies.'

'That's why you are so particularly dull at times. I came down here thinking to put your place a bit to rights for you; but I was too lazy, or tired. I was to tell you from your landlady though, that two gentlemen, who would not leave their names, called to-day and will be back again to-morrow.'

'Good!' said Heatherleigh to me. 'I swear they want to offer me a commission to paint a picture for the Prince of Wales.'

'No,' said Polly, with her black eyes twinkling maliciously, 'I believe they are like the unbelieving Jews — they seek a sign.'

'You are very wicked, Polly, do you know?' he said carelessly, filling a pipe. 'You will never be tamed and made respectable until you marry. I wish I were the happy man.'

'I wish you were,' she said, with a laugh. 'But no. You will never be such a fool as

to offer to marry me; and I shouldn't be such a fool as to accept you, if you did.'

'I hope I shall never get fond of you, Polly,' he said.

'Why?'

By this time the smile that her chaffing had brought to his face had quite died away, and he was staring pensively into the fire. When he spoke it was as if he were speaking to himself.

'Because the chances are you would die.'

'Good gracious me!' said Polly.

'I sometimes have a notion,' he continued, rather absently, 'that the unknown presence of some fatal malady—some predisposition to death—may lend to women's faces a sort of expression, or tenderness, or sadness, that is peculiarly attractive to some men. The man does not know why he is attracted by this expression—he only knows that all the women he has loved have died off one by

one, while they were still young. It is only a theory, you know, but there are some men who are unlucky like that.'

'Well,' said Polly, 'of all the agreeable topics that were ever started, this is about the most lively. It all comes of your sitting indoors, and taking no interest in anything —not even in your painting. An artist has no business with philosophy—has he, Ted?'

For she called me Ted, too.

'Why, no,' I said; 'but Heatherleigh dabbles in philosophy, in order to excuse his idleness.'

'Well, Polly, suppose we start another topic. Suppose we take you into our confidence, and consult you about this young gentleman's prospects. I propose to assume the garb of an old master, and have him for a pupil—a student—a disciple. In time, he will be able to paint all my pictures for me; and I shall have all the money, while

he reaps all the praise. I propose taking a junior partner into the business; he is to do the work, while I get the profits. What do you think of it, Polly? Did I ever show you the things he has done? They're not very good, you know, my boy; they're chiefly remarkable for cheek. But in a short time you would, I think, be able to paint a good many bits of my interiors for me, and so forth. What do you say, Ted?'

What could I say? Here were two of the very kindest beings I have ever met in this world laying their heads together to help me; and the astonishment and gratitude with which such a circumstance filled me almost blinded me to the obvious fact that Heatherleigh was trying to disguise the nature of his offer. To be plain, he, too, was conferring charity upon me. I knew that for a long time I could not be of the slightest use to him. Besides, he did not

want to make money either by my efforts or his own. He worked by fits and starts—and after he had got a cheque from a dealer, he relapsed into his dawdling ways and indolent, abstemious luxury. He had an amazing gift or trick of manipulation—painting cost him neither study nor pains. He could turn off, when pressed for money, a picture in an inconceivably short space of time; and, if it was not a striking or original work, it was still out of the common run of picture-dealers' pictures. There was not a particle or trace of genius in his work—no bold conception, or lofty aim, or sharp and luminous interpretation; but there was an easy and bright cleverness which had a certain individualism of its own, and which procured a too-ready market for all that he produced. I think he was quite conscious of all this; and that the knowledge helped to confirm him in his indolent ways. He

was not even gifted with the vague hope that he *might* become a great painter. He painted when his funds became low, or when he took a sudden fancy to dress himself remarkably well and give a few companions a dinner at Richmond. He was a handsome man, as I have said; and, when he chose, he could throw off the roughness of his present mode of life, and astonish one with the extreme elegance and finish of his toilette and general appearance. His hands were fine and delicate; he had small feet, and a certain air of refinement and ease which became his intelligent face and well-set neck. When he thus dressed himself, he completed the metamorphosis by becoming absurdly critical in all such matters as wines, cigars, dishes, dress, and manners. He was only acting a part, and imagining what he might have been had he not quarrelled with his family; and yet he acted the part so natu-

rally that his companions, chiefly artists, used to be greatly impressed by such evidences of culture and high-breeding. Next day, you would find him laughing at his own folly—dressed in an old velveteen jacket, with his hair uncombed, his waistcoat open and showing a shirt liberally stained with megilp and colour, his delicate fingers sticky and dirty with varnishes and oils, and on the table beside his easel a short clay pipe and a battered pewter pot filled with half-and-half.

'I say that you are too kind,' I replied—'that I should not be worth my keep for a very long time, if ever.'

'You don't understand, Master Ted,' said he; 'I am entering upon a business speculation. I am buying up rough land, out of which I mean to get great harvests yet. I mean to make an artist of you, Ted.'

'Make an artist of yourself!' said Polly.

'I mean to buy you out of the hands of that charming person, Weavle. I shall hold you as my slave and bondman; and then, when I am an old man, grown white, and lean, and shaky, you shall work for me and pay my little bills, and I shall bless you. You are not bound by any engagement to Weavle?'

'No.'

'Nor by any promise to your parents?'

'No.'

'What do you say, then?'

'I say that if you give me this chance, I will do my very best in whatever way you want; and whether I succeed or not, I shall never forget your kindness to me—about the greatest I have ever received.'

'Bravo!' cried Polly, with a sort of sob—indeed, nothing could equal this kind creature's intense sympathy with everybody and everything around her. 'But do you

know, Ted, what you have to go through before you can become an artist?'

I professed my ignorance; and inwardly hoped that Polly did not mean that I must grace the occasion by kissing her.

'There never yet,' said she, 'was an artist, or an author, or a poet, or anybody who had to live by his wits that was of any good until he had met with a terrible disappointment in love. You must have your heart half-broken, Ted, before you can do anything. You know, they say that a reaper never does any good until he has cut himself with the sickle; so an artist must get wounded and hurt in the same way before he discovers the way to touch people. We must get your heart broken, Ted.'

'Isn't it a lucky thing that there are so many women,' said Heatherleigh, 'whom Providence seems to have appointed for the purpose. I can easily supply him with any

number of young persons whose profession it is to break your heart with the most charming air in the world. Let's see: I wonder whose house I ought to take him to —to get him broken in, as it were. The air of Lewison's drawing-room—I call his place the Æsthetic Grotto—is too fine and clear for a vigorous, strong flirtation; and yet there are some promising young executioners to be met with there. You remember what Alfred de Musset says:—

> J'aime encore mieux notre torture,
> Que votre métier de bourreau.

There is Bonnie Lesley, as they call her, for example——'

'What?' I said, 'the girl whose face you are constantly sketching?'

'Even so, young sir.'

'If she is like your copies of her, she must be something better than what you say.'

'Oh, she is pretty enough, and sweet enough, doubtless,' said he. 'At least, I presume she is good-looking. In my young days, you could be sure of a woman's being beautiful, because you had a chance of seeing her face.'

'I'll be sworn,' said Polly, 'you have painted her face oftener than she has done. I saw her once in Regent's Park—recognised her directly. I should fall in love with her if I were a man.'

'Very likely,' said Heatherleigh, 'and, if you were a man, you would probably regret it. However, I am glad to hear you say a kindly word for her, Polly. You women are so very distrustful of each other.'

'I suppose it's because we know ourselves so well,' said Polly, with a sigh.

Heatherleigh now rang the bell, and begged his landlady to send up supper. It was soon on the table—cold mutton, pickled

onions, water-cresses, cheese, and half-and half, with a small bottle of stout for Polly's exclusive use.

Polly Whistler and I frequently supped there; and at these modest entertainments the girl really made a most charming companion. She had an inexhaustible fund of good spirits; and she had a playful, ingenious wit that I have never seen approached by any other woman. Of course, the brilliant, and sharp, and odd things she was constantly uttering lost none of their effect by the freedom of her manners, or by a half-dramatic trick she had of giving them point and expression; and yet there was never a trace of rudeness or bad taste in anything she said or did. Heatherleigh used to lie back in his big wooden chair, and listen with a sort of lazy enjoyment and paternal forbearance to her rapid talk, her bright laughter, and her shrewd and humorous hits.

He, too, in his indolent fashion, would often meet her half-way in these sarcastic comments on men, women, and the accidents of life. She used to laugh, and talk, and jibe for the mere pleasure of amusing her companions and herself; but you could see that in his lazy epigrams upon human nature there was just a touch of bitterness—as if, unconsciously to himself, he was exhibiting marks of that old and useless struggle against the hard, resisting mass of the world. There was a half-concealed pungency about his wit that made you think he was scarcely himself aware of its acrid flavour; and to one who was accustomed to his ways, his sayings had the unusual merit of appearing to be dragged from him. I never saw him talk for effect—even in trying to amuse a girl, when a man is scarcely expected to be accurate, honest, or sensible. He and Polly used to relish these quiet little meetings

keenly; and I—why I thought there never were in the world two people who enjoyed themselves so thoroughly and in so innocent a fashion, who were so good-natured and disinterested and frank and kind to everybody, high and low, whom they met. But I knew they were exceptions; for the average of human nature was as yet represented to me by Weavle.

Then we went to see Polly home. She lived just round the corner, in Albany Street, behind Regent's Park; and when she bade us good-bye, she said she should some day go to see my picture in the Academy. The words thrilled through me, and for a moment I could see nothing of the dark houses and the pavement, and of my two companions—but instead a great room filled with fashionable folks in splendid attire, all come to look at the rows of brilliant pictures. If I could but get a modest corner there!

I said to myself, with a strange throb—and if, by chance, my obscure and little effort were to be glanced at, even for a moment, by——

'Thank you, Polly,' said I, with the old bitter consciousness falling down on me again; 'my work has already been seen on the Academy walls, and I suppose it will be again—on the frames.'

So we turned away, Heatherleigh and I, and walked carelessly onward. It was a beautiful night, still and mild, with a full moon shining on the pale fronts of the tall houses that lie along the north side of Regent's Park, and glittering here and there on the glossy leaves of the young birches. There was almost no one to be seen along the white pavements; but occasionally we passed a house the windows of which were lit up, gleaming warm and red into the pale grey light outside. We walked

round Regent's Park, and Primrose Hill, and along the Finchley Road towards the neighbourhood of Hampstead; Heatherleigh talking of many things—of the project he had proposed to me, of Polly Whistler, and, latterly, of that old dead love of his, and of all the beautiful hopes and aspirations that lay buried in her grave. He seldom talked of her; when he did, there was something to me almost terrible in witnessing the emotion of this strong man—of the piteous way in which he used to look back and wonder how the world could have compassed this cruel and irremediable thing that was to haunt the rest of his life with its shadow. And yet there was a sweetness in the memory of it, I think, as I think there is in the memory of all our great sorrows—so long as these have not been the result of our own wilfulness or folly.

'Come,' he said, 'let us talk of something

else. Do you know I regard Polly Whistler as the most heroic little woman I know? How Polly would laugh if you were to tell her she was a heroine. Did you hear, just as we walked off, an angry screech of a woman's voice from inside the house?

'I heard something of the sort.'

'That note of kindly welcome was sounded by her mother, who, I suppose, has returned from her concert in a state of intoxication. Fred Ward told me this morning of the frightful persecution the girl suffers at the hands of this woman, who spends all her earnings, and threatens her if she does not bring home more money. When she is in one of her drunken fits, she follows the girl through the streets, and goes up to the studios after her, and insists upon getting money.'

'Fred Ward,' said I, 'must have been putting more imagination into his story than

he ever did into one of his pictures. How is it Polly never hinted anything of the kind, but, on the contrary, has always spoken very generously and nicely about her "old woman?" How is it that the old woman never pestered you for money?'

'There's the odd thing,' said he. 'You know Polly only sits to three or four fellows, all of whom I know. Every one of them, it seems, is familiarly acquainted with the mother, except myself; and Ward told me that Polly had made very great sacrifices that I might not know, and begged them all not to tell me. Indeed, the old woman, it seems, holds up a visitation to my studio as the highest threat she can use, and Polly will do anything rather than that I should learn what sort of mother she has got. Ward says it is time that this terrorism should cease, and that I ought to explain to Mother Whistler that she had

better drop it. He says, too, that the girl's conduct towards her mother is simply admirable—in kindness, and forbearance, and good-nature. But now I can look back and explain a good many things about Polly that used to puzzle me sometimes.'

'Well,' I said, 'if I were you, I should not tell her that I knew. The girl doesn't want you to think ill of her mother; give her her own way.'

'I'll consider about it,' he replied; 'but if I could get a private word with Mrs. Whistler, at some sober moment, I should like to tell her what might be the result of her conduct upon a girl less determined in character than poor Polly.'

It was nearly one o'clock when we drew near Primrose Hill again. The streets were now quite deserted, and there was scarcely a light to be seen in any of the windows of the tall, pale houses. As we came round

by Albert Road, however, we observed one house in which the lower rooms were yet lit up. Heatherleigh crossed over, and we paused in front of the railings.

'That is the Æsthetic Grotto,' he whispered; 'I wonder who are inside at present?'

The windows were open and the Venetian blinds were down; the latter, from their sloping position, showing only gleaming lines of the roof and chandeliers inside. Presently a girl's voice was heard—a pure and high soprano, that rose clearly and fully above the delicate rippling accompaniment of the piano. In the stillness of the night we heard every tone and modulation of the exquisite voice, and I, for one, stood entranced there, drinking in the beautiful, touching melody.

'I think it is Schubert's,' said Heather-

leigh; 'the Lewisons are mad about Schubert.'

At length the song was finished, and the blank stillness that followed struck painfully on the ear.

'They are unusually late to-night,' said Heatherleigh. 'They keep open house every evening, for everybody who has musical or literary or artistic tastes. The place is a perfect den of big and small celebrities, and sometimes they have the most brilliant little gatherings.'

After a moment, he said with a smile—

'Do you know who was singing that German song, just now?'

'How should I?'

'It was Bonnie Lesley, as they call her.'

## CHAPTER V.

### IN REGENT'S PARK.

ON THE first morning that I walked up Tottenham Court Road towards Heatherleigh's studio, with th old shadow of Weavle removed from over me, I felt that the world had grown immeasurably wider. It was the morning of the first of May, and all the sweet influences of the season were added to this one supreme sensation of breadth, and life, and a joyous and active future. I imagined myself then going to conquer the world. I felt the delight of anticipation tingling through me. I straightened up my shoulders and sniffed the fresh morning air, which was

sweet and grateful even in this dingy district. I clenched my fists, brought them up to my chest, and shot them out again as if I were knocking down a Weavle on each side. To my horror and surprise, I found that, as a matter of fact, I had in my blind exultation, dealt a severe blow to an elderly gentleman, who had been crossing the street, and was just about to step on the pavement.

'You great, lumbering idiot!' he said.

I turned, and made the most ample and profuse apologies, which he cut short with

'Go to the ——.'

I did not hear him complete the sentence as he angrily turned away, but I can imagine how it ended. Yet I would have braved any amount of anger to hear those words 'great, lumbering,' applied to me. Was it, then, that I might not be so deficient

in bodily presence as I had imagined? I regarded myself in the window of a shoe-shop. I did not cut a distinguished figure —that was clear. I was obviously taller than the old gentleman whom I had hurt in a sensitive place, but then he was of the barrel order of human architecture. For the rest, I had not much in my appearance on which to pride myself. There was a certain lean and hungry look on my pale face, which the staring dark eyes, and rather beak-like nose, did not diminish. By accident, my hair had been allowed to grow long, and, as I looked at myself in this extemporised mirror, I could compare myself to nothing so much as a hungry Italian refugee, who had lost some notion or idea when he was young, and spent the rest of his life in wistfully trying to recall it. Pictured against the rows of shining boots, my face must have seemed that of one

75477

unsatisfied, meditative, melancholy, and perhaps a trifle older-looking than I ought to have been at my years.

'Good-morrow to the youthful Apelles,' said Heatherleigh, when I entered. 'You have come betimes. I presume you mean to set to work immediately.'

He was lying in his big easy-chair, his leg over the one arm of it, a clay pipe in his mouth, a volume of Bain in his hand, the breakfast things still on the table. He certainly had not washed, and you could only say by way of courtesy that he had dressed.

'If you please,' I said.

I felt very nervous all the same, and looked timidly round to see if there was anything I fancied I might be able to do for him. I glanced at the picture which was on his principal easel. It was a remarkably clever study of a lady of

Charles II.'s time, seated in a high-backed chair, with a couple of spaniels playing at her feet. There was absolutely no idea or aim whatever in the picture; he had merely taken this pretty and cleverly-painted face, and surrounded it with a few appropriate accessories.

'What do you think of that?' he said.

'I don't see what you mean by it,' I answered, in a tone which doubtless told him what I thought of the picture.

'I will tell you, then. I mean money by it. It is a sketch I made for the market some eight months ago. I had the good sense to be ashamed of it, and turned its face to the wall. I took it down this morning, and mean to finish it—why? do you think?'

Of course, I had no idea.

'Because Professor Bain has just been pointing out to me that I have a natural

genius for being happy. In the country, I have the keen pleasure of Self-conservation—the storing up of physical health and nervous energy; in the town, I have the indolent pleasure of Stimulation—drawing upon that store of superfluous vitality. If Stimulation were out of the question, and all our pleasures only increased our health! As it is, however, it seems to me, Master Pupil, that I have not been balancing the two—that I must have more of Self-conservation; and as I propose, consequently, to go into the country, I took down that picture to find the means.'

'I shall be very glad if you will instruct me in Philosophy as well as in Art,' I said.

'That notion has just occurred to me. But then, you see, the old masters of philosophy were accustomed to talk to their disciples under the trees and in the leafy alleys of Academus; and, accordingly, the

best thing I think we can do on this fine morning is to take a walk in Regent's Park. What do you say?'

'It is for you to decide, of course,' I answered; but the notion of thus being able to walk out anywhere in the hours which ought to be devoted to work was thoroughly bewildering to me. Nor could I throw off an impression that there was something wrong in the proposal; and that, if we did go out, we should be 'caught.'

'I must dress,' he said, getting up out of the chair, 'and, meanwhile, I will put you on your trial. You see I have sketched in behind the lady that screen over there. If you like, you can try your hand at finishing it—keeping it very quiet. Use my palette until I get you one for yourself. There, sit you down.'

He left, and I sat down before the picture with fear and trembling. My hand

shook so that I could scarce squeeze the colour out of the tubes; and my eyes seemed to throb and burn. The screen was an old, tattered thing, which had at one time been covered with coloured maps. Now all these had subsided, until the surface was a mass of cool greys, with here and there just a touch of warmer tint, where Africa or England was vaguely visible. It was an admirable bit of background; but how was I to attempt it?

I wonder if Heatherleigh purposely delayed his return. At first, it seemed to me that every moment the door leading into his small bedroom would open, and that he would walk over to the picture to see that I had been too nervous to begin it at all. Then the brush began to work a little better; and although my eyes still throbbed and burned so that at times the whole screen and room faded away and left only

a spotted mist there, I felt, rather than saw that the screen in the picture was beginning to look somewhat like the actual screen beyond.

This was not by any means the first time I had attempted painting in oil. Many a chance effort I had made to wrestle with the stronger medium; although I always returned to water-colour as that which I could use most easily. It is well-known that tyros paint more presentably in oil than in water—their experience of both being equal; but I had dabbled in water-colour for two or three years, while my acquaintance with oil was exceedingly limited. From the moment, however, in which I had accepted Heatherleigh's offer, I had industriously experimented with a few of the cheapest tubes and some bits of board, until I could fairly copy the different colours and hues of the objects around me.

Yet to have my clumsy manipulation placed exactly side by side with Heatherleigh's dexterous and clean touch was a cruel test.

At length, the door opened, and he walked across the room. The brush fell from my hand, and I had nearly dropped myself, for my head was swimming with the superlative concentration of the last half-hour. Very probably, too, my face was a trifle paler than usual; for I noticed that he regarded me curiously, before he looked at the picture at all, and that he kindly placed his hand on my shoulder as he proceeded to scan the wild effort I had made.

I felt myself grow hot and cold alternately in that moment of dire suspense; and when he said, with a tone of surprise, 'By Jove!' it was as if a blow of some sort had struck me. I dared scarcely say

to myself what that exclamation might mean.

Then he said, quietly and cheerfully—

'Whatever made you try to paint in all that accurately in five minutes? Of course, it won't do, you know; but the effort you have made, and the result you have gained, in a few minutes, is astounding.'

I rose up, keeping firm hold—I know not why—of the brushes and the palette.

'Do you think,' I said—'do you consider ——'

Then I felt that I was reeling, and knew vaguely that he put out his arm quickly to catch me. After that a blank. When I came to, I found that I had fallen backward, striking my head against the table. Heatherleigh led me into his bedroom, and made me bathe my head in cold water. After a few minutes, I was all right.

'Come,' said he, with a quiet smile on

his face, 'take my arm, and let's go for a walk in Regent's Park.'

We went out into the cool, fresh air; and I was proud of the exhaustion I felt, for I knew it had been incurred in that one terrible effort to cut for ever the chain that bound me to Weavle and the old hard times. But was it of any avail? He had never answered my question; and I dared not ask it again, lest he might tell me, in tone if not in words, that I could never be useful to him—that the dreams I had already began to dream were visionary, impossible, hopeless.

After a few minutes' silence, he said to me, gravely and kindly—

'If you don't find some means of curbing that impulsive and impetuous will of yours, I fear your life will be neither a long one nor a happy one. If you suffer your temperament to lead you into the habit of de-

siring successive things so earnestly that you lose all consciousness and judgment in striving for them, you will find yourself subjected in life to a series of the bitterest disappointments, and these revulsions might have a disastrous effect on one so sensitive as you are. There is nothing of an intensely dramatic or tragic kind that I can imagine as being unlikely to fall in your way. You are the sort of man, for example, who, if I mistake not, would coolly and deliberately blow out your brains if some woman you had set your heart on proved unfaithful to you.'

'You imagine all that,' I said, 'because I tried hard to paint the screen. But I didn't know that I had been trying hard until it was all over.'

'Precisely,' he said; 'you entirely abandon yourself to a passing mood or fancy. I have remarked it several times. Now what would be the result if you happened to set before

you one supreme aim—if you staked all your chances upon one throw?'

'In what direction do you mean?' I asked.

'In any. You say to yourself *I will never cease striving until I have painted a Madonna to eclipse Raphael's*, or *I will win such and such a woman, or die.* You are just as likely as not, in either case, to aim at something quite impossible. The result?—when you find yourself cheated in your notions of your own power, when you find the chief object of your life removed from you, what is more likely than that you will suddenly put an end to a wretched failure—by a pennyworth of poison.'

'You want me to confine myself to easy possibilities?'

'To possibilities.'

'Who is to tell me what is possible to me? Suppose I have an unconscionable vanity, that might make me hope to win this

or that prize? Or don't you think that one may feel the delight of striving for anything —however impossible—a greater happiness than the achieving of some small immediate success? You yourself—don't you constantly aim at something new and unknown in a picture, and chance the failure?'

'No, I don't,' he said, with a laugh. 'I know very accurately what I can do; but I am out of court in the matter. I know that I am myself a failure; and the knowledge doesn't bother me. All I say to you is this—take heed not to set your desires too high; for to you a disappointment might be a catastrophe of a sudden and final kind.'

For me to set my desires too high! I inwardly laughed at the notion. Was it not enough that I was permitted at times to break through the hard conditions of life by dreaming?—by dreaming of things which

were possible to others, but which were to me for ever impossible.

So we went round and entered Regent's Park. Heatherleigh kept talking of all sorts of things—following, as usual, the most diverse moods of morbid introspection, of gay raillery, of bitter sarcasm. Yet all this was coloured by a broad, warm light of kindliness which, I suppose, partly owed its origin to the evident enjoyment he had in exercising himself in any way. Life was really a happiness to him; and his sharp speeches, and brooding analyses, and light-hearted jocularity were as great a delight to him as the physical acts of breathing, and seeing, and walking—all of which he enjoyed with an enjoyment that was at times just a trifle too conscious. I do not believe that he had a single care to cloud his mind. He had long ago cut all connection with whatever relatives he may have had; and was free

from necessary friendships and forced duties. His few acquaintances were of his own manner of living; and he could obtain their society just in such proportion as he chose. He could make more money than he needed; and the labour was neither painful nor irksome to him. He had no particular aim or desire to torment him; he rejoiced in his physical strength, in his mental clearness, as he rejoiced in the flavours of food and beer and tobacco. How a man, living under such circumstances, failed to become a selfish misanthrope, I never could understand.

'Don't you ever mean to marry?' I said to him, this morning, as we were passing the Zoological Gardens, and were coming in view of the broad park, that lay green and beautiful in the May sunlight.

'Sometimes I wish somebody would take the trouble to marry me,' he said. 'I think I am in the position of a good many un-

married men. They know they could be very affectionate and contented if they married; but they know the bother and peril of looking out for a wife, and don't care to run the risk. You glance round the circle of your acquaintance, and see a number of more or less sensible, pretty, and well-meaning girls. You can't marry one of them without spending ever so much time and anxiety in finding out her disposition, and also without encountering the nuisance of rivalship. Then you may either find yourself mistaken and be disgusted with your waste of trouble, or you may really fall in love with her, and find her perverse or inclined to marry somebody else—and so on; while all the time you are losing the best years of your life in this perplexing, and irritating, and often profitless search. Of course, I am talking of men who are a little anxious about the sort of woman they mean to marry. At your

age, I fell in love with everything that wore earrings, and would have married anybody capable of saying "I will."'

'Yet men do marry,' I said, 'in spite of all the current talk.'

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'in the meantime they do. But if our young men cultivate their present notions and habits, we shall soon have this world getting so far to be like heaven that there shall be in it neither marrying nor giving in marriage. At present——'

Either he paused, or I forgot to listen. For some minutes I had been gazing vaguely at two figures which were walking slowly towards us under the trees. While they were yet a long way off, the lines of sunshine falling across the path from between the branches gleamed upon them from time to time; and it seemed to me that the materials for a very pretty French picture were there

before us—in the straight road, the long and narrowing avenue of trees, the bars of sunlight, and the fashionably-dressed ladies who were walking together. Without thinking of them, I was admiring the contrast in their costume. One of them wore a tight-fitting dress of black silk and crape, with a rather lengthy train that added height and dignity to her somewhat short and slight figure. Even at that distance, I could see that she walked with a wonderful ease and grace, that made the girlish little person look almost majestic. *Incedit reginâ.* Her companion, on the other hand, actually shone in the sunlight; for she wore a gauzy white dress, the upper and tight portion of which was touched here and there with bright blue, while the under part revealed a bold dash of colour in the gleam of a blue silk petticoat. Then she wore a small white hat, with a blue feather in it; and she had a bit of blue near

her neck; while she carried in her arms a white Pomeranian dog, which, like herself, wore a collar of blue satin ribbon, with absurdly big bows. She had profuse golden hair, and a bright complexion that the twilight of her white parasol scarcely dimmed. Indeed, so very brilliant and beautiful was this apparition, that as the belts of sunlight through which she passed broadened, and as she came nearer, I could not keep from regarding the harmonious taste of the dress and the singular effect the whole figure produced in the alternate green shadow and yellow sunlight—insomuch that I paid no attention to the other lady by her side.

I suppose we all of us often look at people without seeing them—stare in their faces, while thinking of something else, and are yet quite guiltless of intentional rudeness. I know that I had fallen into a sort of trance,

and heard nothing more of Heatherleigh's voice, when I suddenly observed a smile of surprise appear on the face of the girl in white and blue. I knew, rather than saw, that Heatherleigh lifted his hat, and went forward to speak to her. At the same time, as I was naturally passing on, I caught a glimpse of a pair of eyes that *had been* looking at me. I only remembered, a minute afterwards, when the cold shiver had gone out of me, that these dark, luminous, grey-blue eyes had also a certain surprise in them —perhaps a kindly surprise, and enquiry.

Heatherleigh stopped and talked to the two girls for several minutes; and I was glad. I never could understand the easy dexterity with which the matter-of-fact people in the Scriptures encountered the most startling and unexpected things — how this man answered directly and frankly the questions of an angel; how the other accepted some

great miracle as a thing of course, and only to be considered as getting him food or water. Why were they not wholly paralysed and overwhelmed with wonder? why did they not instinctively beg for time to comprehend and realise the mystery before them?

'What a singular coincidence!' said Heatherleigh, laughing, when he came up. 'I was just going to speak of her in connection with your marriage-topic. Do you know who that was?'

'The lady in blue and white?'

'Yes.'

'No, I don't.'

'That, Master Apelles, is the young person to whom Polly and I mean to hand you over in order that your artistic education may be completed. That is she whom her numerous admirers and victims call "Bonnie Lesley."'

'You have contrived to warn me effectively,' I replied.

'That may have been a mistake of mine, from an artistic point of view,' he said, laughing. 'But perhaps if I were to tell you why I like to run down that young creature, you might be inclined to take up the cudgels for her, and impound me. Seriously, she is a very nice sort of girl. She is staying at the Lewisons' at present, as I imagined when I heard her sing there. I fancy she lives there chiefly now. I told her the service I wanted of her as regards you. She was very willing; and hopes you will go with me to the Lewisons' house on Thursday evening. It is only one of their ordinary evenings—æsthetics and mild refreshments. I promised you would come with me.'

I looked at him; I thought he was joking; but he was not.

'One or two young men about town

come in evening dress,' he continued; 'but Lewison doesn't care about that element, and discourages it. His wife likes it, for the sake of her young-lady friends, and of course where Bonnie Lesley is, there young fools are sure to be.'

'What did she do to you,' I said to him, compassionately, 'that you should be so bitter about her?'

'She once made me believe that she had a heart; but I discovered afterwards that it was only an organ with two openings, situated in a cavity of the chest, for the convenience of the lungs.'

'I understand.'

'No; don't mistake me; Bonnie Lesley and I were never lovers. But of that anon. What I want to say to you is this: mind, in speaking to her, not to ask her too particularly where she has lived—I mean, in what particular place she was brought up.'

'Where do her parents live?'

'She hasn't any.'

'Her relations, then?'

'She hasn't any. I don't think she ever had either the one or the other. I imagine that on some hushed, warm afternoon in summer, when everything was lazy and quiet and solemn, somebody down in some still valley saw a small angel, dressed in blue and white, with a tiny white hat and a blue feather, drop quietly down from the clouds. And she has grown up to be Bonnie Lesley, and the hat has grown with her. Really there seems to be a good deal of vagueness about her antecedents. For myself, I only know that she is acquainted with some parts of France and Germany. Whoever called her Bonnie Lesley, must have supposed she was Scotch; but, if she is, she must take uncommon pains to conceal the fact. She has her notions of form and colour, too, has that

young woman. Do you know what she said of you?'

'No.'

'That you might, with proper dressing, resemble either Dante, Schiller, or Vandyke. She preferred Vandyke herself; and I promised to get you to buy a big brown beaver, with a broad and dashing rim.'

'Tell me honestly—did you or she speak of me at all?' I said.

'I give you my word of honour that she expects to see you at the Lewisons' on Thursday next.'

'What did the lady who was with her say?'

'The girl in black? Nothing particular. By the way, I did not catch her name when I was introduced to her.'

'I can tell you that,' I said, 'it is Miss Hester Burnham.'

'What?—the girl who has got the big

house down in that valley you are constantly talking about?'

'Yes. My father is her gamekeeper. I suppose she, too, is staying at the Lewisons', and I dare say you would consider it as rather appropriate that I should go there and meet her on equal terms!'

'Monsieur, you mistake. When you enter the Æsthetic Grotto, you leave all such considerations behind. Besides, what does it matter to you whether your father is Miss Burnham's keeper, or the devil, or anybody? You are an artist. I have given you the royal accolade. You are the equal of all men upon the earth, even if your purse be rather short, and your reputation nothing to speak of. But if I had known that the quiet little girl was Miss Burnham, I should have looked at her attentively. I only know that she had singularly fine eyes, and a soft and pretty voice.'

I was unwilling to let him imagine that it was because my father was a gamekeeper, (though even that suggested the propriety of my not meeting Miss Burnham) that I did not wish to go to the Lewisons' house. So I told him the whole story of that visit to Burnham which was yet fresh and keen in my memory. When I had finished he looked at me curiously, and said—

'You are a strange creature. I can't make you out.'

'If you had been in my place,' I asked, 'wouldn't you have felt as I felt?'

'I should have laughed at the whole affair. I should not be glowing with indignation and anger and wrath as you are now. Come, suppose we go to Lewisons' on Thursday. Suppose we beg Miss Burnham to rebel against her womanly instincts, and speak the truth, for once. Suppose we ask her——'

'If I go,' I said to him (while I felt my face flush), 'it will be to meet her as an equal.'

'Bravely spoken,' said he, 'but you forget one thing: it is very unlikely she will be there. The Lewisons' house is not a hotel.'

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE ÆSTHETIC GROTTO.

But long before Thursday evening, my courage failed me. I had had wild ideas of revenge and self-assertion, and all the rest of it; but not even these would permit me to be guilty of an impertinence; and an impertinence I certainly considered the notion of my being present as a guest in any house where Miss Burnham was also a guest. I told Heatherleigh I would not go.

In the meantime I applied myself earnestly to whatever snatches of work he allowed me to undertake. Looking back at that strange probationary period, I can scarcely

say whether I had grown bold enough to consider certain dreams of mine possible of realisation; or whether it was only the fever of impatience and desire, begotten of a certain extravagant purpose that had nothing to do with art, which drove me into constant and painful effort to leap over necessary study and achieve definite results. Heatherleigh looked at the matter from a practical point of view.

'You are still labouring under the habit you acquired in Weavle's place,' he said, 'of thinking that you must constantly be working. Why, absolute idleness is the very commissariat of art—that fine, receptive calm in which you are storing up, unconsciously, experiences and reflections for future use. You work as if Weavle were constantly at your elbow.'

Polly Whistler took great interest in my progress: and used to tell the most auda-

cious lies in the form of criticism upon my labours. I was so very grateful for her encouragement and kindness that I was nearly falling in love with her. But Polly had a fine, practical way with her, which not only instantly detected any such tentative lapse from the explicit relations existing between her and the people around her, but also set the matter straight again with a surprising and business-like swiftness. Early love, of this nebulous and uncertain kind, thrives upon secrecy, but is killed by frankness; and Polly was uncommonly frank.

'I'll be a mother to you, if you like,' she said to me, in her merry way, 'but you mustn't fall in love with me, because then you would get angry because I didn't fall in love with you. It seems to me a pity that men and women can't be friends with each other without falling in love and spoiling it all, becoming jealous and cantankerous and

exacting. Everybody should take a lesson from Mr. Heatherleigh and me.'

I looked up at her as she uttered the last words, and she inadvertently dropped her eyes.

To return, however, to the proposed meeting at Lewison's house. On the Wednesday, Heatherleigh brought me a positive assurance that Miss Burnham could not be present on the following evening, and also Mr. and Mrs. Lewison's cards, with their compliments. In the end, I went.

This was my first introduction into anything like society; and for a time I could scarcely tell, myself, what my first impressions were. The chief thing that struck me, I think, was the extreme quiet and repose of the people. They seemed to live in a delicate atmosphere, which caused small sensations to appear large to them. They never had to emphasize what they had to say; and

there was a general apprehension of minute points and appearances which made me a little nervous. The very air of the room seemed to be fine and watchful and critical.

Mr. Lewison was a tall, fair man, with a partially bald head, dark blue eyes, and a red moustache. He had a peculiarly bland, easy manner about him which puzzled me; because it seemed to lift him so entirely above that sphere of struggle, and competition, and passionate impulses with which I was familiar. I think he had been in business; at any rate, he was now living as a private gentleman, his chief amusement being the making of his house an open resort for all sorts of artistic and literary persons.

When Heatherleigh and I entered the large and brilliant room, there were not more than a dozen people there. Miss Lesley was at the piano, singing a rather commonplace ballad in her splendid style.

She had an excellent soprano voice, tenderly expressive, and perfectly cultivated. There was a gentleman by her side, in evening dress, who was turning over the leaves of music for her.

I was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Lewison, and found myself surprisingly at ease with both. Indeed, I found at this time that, however apprehensive I might be about meeting any stranger, I had no sooner begun to enter into conversation than my embarrassment vanished. Besides, all the responsibilities and formalities lay upon Heatherleigh.

When Miss Lesley had finished singing, she took the arm of the gentleman who had been waiting upon her, and crossed the room towards us. I saw with dismay that her companion was Mr. Alfred Burnham. Instinctively I glanced round the room again to see that she whom I had feared to

meet was not there. No; there was no one even resembling her.

The young man with the hook nose, the cold grey eyes, and closely-cropped yellowish hair moved off to another part of the room, and Miss Lesley was left talking to Heatherleigh. Then Heatherleigh introduced me to her; and, somehow or other, I found myself seated beside her, on a couch, turning over a collection of proof-engravings.

I had listened to her voice but for a few moments, when I began to wonder how Heatherleigh could have spoken so unfairly of the girl. Was it to surprise me with the contrast? She had a face that, in spite of its full-grown and developed beauty—its broad, fine tints, and dazzling complexion—was almost childlike in its simplicity of expression; large, blue eyes of great tenderness of colour and depth; a full little mouth, rosy and plump; a somewhat low, smooth,

Grecian brow; and great masses of yellow hair, that were artistically arranged and decorated with a broad band of violet velvet. She wore a low white dress, with a train of heavy violet satin, and there was round her white neck a thick gold serpent, whose diamond head and ruby eyes, lying upon her bosom, scarcely rose and fell as she breathed or laughed. That this glorious creature should waste upon me—upon me alone—a single thought or word would at another time have seemed incredibly absurd to me; but under the spell of her voice—which had a scarcely perceptible lisp that was singularly quaint and attractive—I forgot all considerations of whatever kind, and went on talking to her as if I were in a dream, only to hear the sound of her voice in reply.

She asked me if I liked the song she had sung. There was but one answer to the

question: perhaps I did not limit my expressions as I ought to have done.

'I am so glad,' she said, with a pretty smile in her eyes, as she played with an ivory paper-knife that she held in her tiny white fingers, 'because here, you know, they don't care for anything but classical music. I feel very guilty when I sing anything that is simple and commonplace, and I am so pleased to discover that some particular one here or there has been enjoying it. You like ballad-music, then?'

'I never heard any kind of music, played on any kind of instrument, that I did not like,' I said enthusiastically, but with absolute truth—'so long as it was in tune. I am like a confirmed drunkard, who will drink anything that will intoxicate him; and the effect that music has upon me is more intoxication than anything else.'

'But Mr. Heatherleigh says you are an

artist. Why, with such a passion for music, did you not become a musician?'

'I am neither an artist, nor a musician, nor anything else that produces,' I said; 'but there is no sort of art that I do not enjoy. As for being a musician, I dare say I should keep in tune if I played on the drum.'

'But if you enjoy every kind of music,' she said, with a kind of childish wonder, 'what is the value of a compliment from you? Perhaps you thought the song I sung rather stupid, although you liked the jingle of the music.'

'Well, I did,' I said.

'But you must prefer some kind of music to other kinds.'

'I should have preferred hearing you sing a German song that you once sung when I was listening outside, at the railings.'

'Ah, do you like German music?' she said, turning her large and beautiful eyes

upon my face, and blinding me. 'I love it. I think it is charming.'

Now 'charming' is not exactly the adjective which I should have applied to German music. I never could see prettiness in the sea. But then, Miss Lesley was a very young girl; and very young girls are not always apt at choosing the proper word to describe their emotion or opinion. If you had looked at the perfect flower of her face, at its changing lights and tenderness, you would have seen that the pathos and utter misery of the old German ballads, and the mystic grandeur of the German classical music, were somehow themselves expressed there.

We talked of all manner of things—of the pictures before us, of artistic subjects generally, of the people in the room. On the last point, she was very confidential; describing not only the one or two celebrities present, but also her own impressions of

them. What chiefly struck me about her was her childlike desire to obtain information. Once or twice, I turned and regarded her, to see if she were making fun: but no—the large, infantine blue eyes still begged for the knowledge she had demanded. She was so anxious to acquire a correct taste in artistic matters, she said. She did not wish to appear stupid; and she would be very grateful if I would privately give her some little assistance.

'You see how I am situated,' she said, as she pretended to turn over the engravings which neither of us heeded. 'I meet here men and women who are profoundly learned in subjects of which I know nothing. I dare not speak of these things and confess my ignorance, or they would look upon me as a barbarian. Now, with regard to old pictures, the only rule I have been able to make out for myself is to admire whatever is

very dirty, very ugly, and indistinguishable. In crockery—enamelled faïence, don't they call it?—in china and glass and such things, I find my only chance is to seize upon what is more than usually absurd and extravagant. If the lizards, frogs, and eels on the plate are very ugly and ridiculous, then one is safe in praising it; and if the drinking-glass be dirty, of a bad shape, and useless, it is certain to be some rare specimen of Venetian or some such ware. I find it the same in other things. If one is turning over a collection of ferns, for instance, one may be certain that the ugliest and most insignificant are the rarest. Of course, it is only my ignorance that makes me think so; and I should be so grateful to any one who would kindly explain to me the real beauty of artistic marvels. But then, it would have to be quite secret—this instruction. When grown-up people learn to

dance, you know, they are very much ashamed of the process, and make it quite private. Suppose you were to go and bring me the black thing that Mr. Lewison has just put down—on the top shelf of that Chinese what-not.'

It was a Japanese jug in bronze, with a curious handle, and a long, slender spout. The design of the jug was very graceful, and the workmanship remarkably delicate. I fetched it, and showed it to Miss Lesley, who regarded it with that air of pretty wonder which was almost the typical expression of her face.

'Shall we go into the room opposite?' she said. 'They use it as a sort of picture-gallery; and I suppose you have not seen the pictures.'

She took my arm, and we left. The large room we found to be lit up, although there was no one in it. There was an im-

posing array of pictures all round, and one of them especially having caught my eye as I entered, we went towards it. I can remember only that it was the figure of a young man, who sat dejected and alone amid a curious flood of golden light. The whole character of the painting was Greek; and it was apparently decorative in treatment. Despite the obvious mannerism of it, it was a work of singular power.

'Isn't it very pretty?' she said, with the same expression of gentle wonder on her face. 'It was done by ——, who is a great friend of ——'s, the poet, whom you will see here to-night most likely. It represents some story, Mr. Heatherleigh told me; but he did not say what it was.'

'I know the story,' I said, as soon as I heard the name of the young poet, who had then just made his appearance, and who was puzzling the sober-minded critics with the

reckless impertinences and wilfulnesses of his unmistakable genius.

'Will you tell it to me?' she said, sitting down upon a couch.

'How can I translate it into prose?' I answered. 'However, the story is of a young Scandinavian poet who dies. You find him in the world of spirits, wandering about moody and discontented. Odin comes to him, and asks him why he complains. He says it is because the maiden whom he loved on earth must now have grown old, and grey, and wrinkled, and when she, too, comes into heaven, he will not be able to recognise her.

'"Does she love you still?" asks the god.

'"Her love is like mine," says the poet; "it is the same always."

'So Odin sends him down to earth, and bids him seek out his old love. He wan-

ders about, and cannot find her. At last he enters a chamber, and finds there the dead body of an old and wrinkled woman, and they tell him that the dead woman is the woman he loved. At first he is sorrowful and then he is glad; for he says, "I still love her; and now I shall know her when I get back to heaven." So he bids farewell to earth again, and prepares to meet his love grown old and careworn. But he is just entering heaven when he sees before him, with a smile on her face, the very maiden whom he knew in his youth. She comes forward, and takes him by the hand; but he is half-afraid, for he thinks that Odin has played him a trick.

'"Are you really my little Frida, whom I loved long ago?"

'"I am your little Frida; don't you know me?" she asks.

'"But I saw you lying dead; and you were old and grey."

'"And don't you know," she says, "that the gods have decreed that whoever loves truly shall always be young? I shall be always to you your little Frida, whom you loved long ago."'

When I had finished my poor effort at conveying a notion of the story, she sighed gently, and said—

'How very pretty! Do you know many of these stories?'

'No,' I said, 'for that is the story of a modern poem; but old Scandinavian and German poetry is full of such legends.'

'I should like to listen to them for ever,' she said, with a sort of pleased curiosity in her eyes.

Then we rose, and made a tour of the pictures. Her remarks puzzled and perplexed me. It was not that she made

any great mistakes, or talked nonsense; but that she seemed to have the same appreciation of every quality of excellence. Nothing seemed to affect her beyond a certain point; and everything seemed to reach that point. We crossed a very pretty hearth-rug, and I drew her attention to the quiet and artistic pattern of it—so different from the staring bunches of red roses and white ribbon which I had seen in upholsterers' windows. Well, she appeared to be as much struck by that as by a small moonlight scene of Turner's, which was a wonder of idealised and yet literal faithfulness. Sometimes, when a particular picture seemed very striking or powerful to me, I almost begged her to be a little more enthusiastic in her admiration, and then she always was—in words. By this time we had grown quite familiar with each other. She confessed afterwards that she

was astonished by my easy frankness; but then I knew nothing of the reserve that society demands, and she undoubtedly failed to impress it upon me. She so little overawed me that I began to wonder what most affected her—on what side of her character she was most receptive and impressionable. For pictures, it was clear, she cared little; or, rather, she had a general liking, which may have been indiscriminate through imperfect education. But she was never moved by a picture; and I gathered from her admissions that she had no great preference for any kind of music. I wondered whether, on hearing Mozart's Sonata in A sharp, or one of Mendelssohn's splendid choruses, she would only express a faint surprise, as she did on meeting a masterpiece in painting. Or was it that all the artistic side of her nature was cold and shallow, while in matters of personal

feeling she was receptive and warm and deep?

Perhaps some temporary indisposition might have blunted her artistic perceptions. I have noticed that people who were ready to over-praise mediocre work, and be quite enthusiastic about good work, when they entered a picture-exhibition, passed over with indifference or cold distaste the very best pictures when they drew near the end of their visit—so powerful an agent is physical fatigue in destroying the keenness of the æsthetic sense. Perhaps Miss Lesley had a headache, or was annoyed by the non-receipt of a letter; and only out of courtesy expressed a vague acquiescence when I ventured to praise a picture.

At all events, on the emotional side, no one could question the generous width and tenderness of her nature. To look into her eyes was to kill doubt. The warm love

light of them seemed to thaw reserve, and draw you closer to her. You could not help speaking in a low voice to her; you could not help, if you looked at her eyes, unbosoming your most secret confidences and begging for a return of this more than friendly frankness. She seemed to have around her an atmosphere of warmth and kindliness—an atmosphere silent and delicious, that predisposed you to waking dreams. To be near her was to breathe poetry; and yet, when you regarded the statuesque beauty of her bust and neck and head, the fine play of colour and light in her complexion, the warm, supple contour of her face, and the life and tenderness of her eyes, you were puzzled to understand why this glorious woman should, even in one direction, exhibit a hardness or thinness of character that seemed so inconsistent with her soft and stately and yielding beauty.

I was recalled to myself by hearing some voices, and when I looked up (we had again sat down, and I was listening intently to what she was saying) I found Heatherleigh's eyes fixed on me, with a peculiar mocking expression in them. He had been led into the room by Mr. Lewison, who was talking to him; but when I looked up he was quietly regarding us both, with a sardonic smile on his face. It was a corrosive and destructive smile, that seemed to me to have something demoniacal in it. Did he imagine, then, that I was inclined to play Faust to his Mephistopheles? No sooner had Miss Lesley perceived their presence than she asked me to take her into the other apartment; I gladly consented, and so we walked across the room.

A little incident occurred as we were going out.

'Miss Lesley,' said Mr. Lewison, 'do you

know why, according to Mr. Heatherleigh, we ought to be thankful that we are Christians?'

'No,' she said, simply.

'Because, if we were not, some other nation would probably try to make us Christians.'

She uttered a musical little laugh and passed on. But when we had got outside into the hall she said—

'I do dislike conundrums. I never discovered the fun of a conundrum even after it was explained to me.'

'But that isn't quite a conundrum,' I said, with some surprise; 'he means that the process of being made a Christian against your will is rather——'

'I beg you not to waste your time in trying to explain a joke to me,' she said, laughing, but still with the most obvious candour and honesty. 'I assure you I

never could understand the simplest of them. People will not believe me; but I cannot even understand the meaning or enjoyment of a pun. They show me that they say two things, using the same word in each; but I don't see the fun of it—I don't see why they shouldn't use another word. Don't you think me very stupid? Of course, I know it is clever to make a pun; but, if I laugh at one, it is merely as a compliment, as you are expected to admire a painting you don't care for.'

Then, she seemed to recall herself, shrugged her shoulders slightly, and laughed the pretty little laugh again.

'There are some people one cannot help talking freely to; and perhaps I have been creating in your mind a notion that I am a monster of ignorance and dulness. Is it so?'

Now I never could pay a compliment to a woman. If I liked her, and admired this or that in her character, I could and always did become enthusiastic, and was in nowise loth to let her know my exaggerated opinion of her excellences. But absolutely to pay a compliment, in the form of a compliment, to a woman who drove me into it—no. I remained silent—perhaps a trifle vexed that I could not easily fence off the question as any one accustomed to the small word-warfare of society might easily have done.

Fortunately we were just entering the other room; and so my embarrassment was partly concealed.

'Why, she *has* come after all!' exclaimed my companion.

The next moment I caught a glimpse of a small darkly-dressed figure; and I knew that it must be Miss Burnham. I dared not

look her in the face—indeed, I scarcely knew what I did, as Bonnie Lesley relinquished my arm and went forward to greet her friend. Was it she or I who effected the separation? I only know that I walked away, without once turning my head; but I heard Hester Burnham's voice, and I fancied a tall gentleman who was by her side must be Colonel Burnham. I went to the other end of the room, to a small table which stood in a corner and was covered with works in *terra cotta*, and there I busied myself partly with them and partly with devising some means of escape. I had no time to think of how I had been led into the trap; my only desire was to get out of it. It was clear that Miss Burnham had arrived unexpectedly; and I knew that in any case Heatherleigh would not have intentionally deceived me; so there was nothing for it but to get quickly away from

the possible inconveniences and annoyances of this ill chance.

I could not walk out of the house and go home, without offering some apology or explanation to Mr. or Mrs. Lewison. But to get out of the room was my first consideration; afterwards, I could seek Heatherleigh and Mr. Lewison, and make some sort of excuse.

I turned; and there they were—those eyes! She came forward to me—she was alone—and held out her hand. Did not I remember the exact counterpart of this little scene, happening in my mother's room long ago? There was the same friendly light in the wonderful, wise eyes; there was the same queenly ease and grace in the position of the small figure—the same tender entreaty in her voice, as she said—

'Have you not forgiven me yet?'

And I was possessed by the same insuf-

ferable sense of clumsiness and boorishness, as I stood there perplexed and embarrassed, wishing the floor might open under me. Of course, I knew that she wanted no forgiveness—that she did not imagine she had done me any wrong. I knew that the solicitude of her voice and the look in her eyes were but part of that polite training which people in her position necessarily acquire by good example and tuition. It was her sense of courtesy that made her come as a beggar to me, and endeavour to put me at my ease by assuming an attitude which was absurd. If she had accidentally hurt the feelings of her coachman or cook, would she not have been equally desirous to rectify the wrong? And here was I, not able to meet her on equal terms—not knowing in what fashion to put aside this inversion of our natural and real relations. If I had been educated to the fine sensitiveness

and delicacy with which well-bred persons treat such matters, I should have been able to let her know that I understood an effort of courtesy which was prompted by her sense of duty to herself—that I accepted it for what it was worth, and held my position in the affair as nothing so long as she was satisfied—that I did not mistake her humility, but rather looked upon it as a species of proper pride.

All this passed hurriedly and confusedly through my mind, with the painful conviction that she must be imagining that I took her words literally. Imagine a man so unacquainted with the symbolic usages of society as to take the phrase 'your obedient servant,' coming from a stranger, as literal, and presume upon it! In lesser degree, such was the position I saw that I should assume in Hester Burnham's eyes. Finally, I blurted out—

'You are very kind, Miss Burnham. But you know that you have nothing to forgive. Why should you take the trouble to recall that—that mistake?'

She looked at me for a second; and I thanked God I had nothing to conceal from those calm and searching strange eyes.

'You won't shake hands with me?' she said.

It seemed to me that she sighed as she spoke. I could have flung myself at her feet, had I not been vexed at the same moment with the thought that this look of hers was another bit of that delicate by-play which an extreme social courtesy demanded. And it seemed to me monstrous that, merely to preserve her personal pride in being just and courteous to all persons, she should go the length of talking to me, who must be an insignificant nothing in her eyes, in a way that otherwise might have driven a

man mad. Had she but meant what her look and speech and tone conveyed, I would have said to her, 'You are too kind to one such as I am. What can I give you in return for your kindness? I have nothing of any value, except it be my life: if it will but give you five minutes' pleasure, I will lay it with joy at your feet.'

What I did say was this—

'I hope you won't speak of it any more, Miss Burnham. It is too small a matter for you to think twice about.'

And as I did not consider it was for her and me to shake hands, I did not offer her my hand.

She turned away then, a little proudly perhaps, and took the arm of Mr. Alfred Burnham, who was coming towards her. Mrs. Lewison came and sat down beside me. I don't know what she talked about, for Hester Burnham was now singing.

Then I left the room, and found that Heatherleigh, with one or two other men, were in the smoking-room upstairs. Heatherleigh was in an excellent humour; and as he lay in a chair, with his great frame stretched out, he poured forth a continual stream of quaint and odd suggestions, happy repartees, and occasional sharp sayings, that sometimes hit one or other of his companions a little severely. For instance, when I entered, a young man, elaborately dressed and scented, was railing against women, quoting ancient authorities to prove that women were regarded as of the brute creation, and finally declaring that he believed them to be a superior species of monkey. Heatherleigh was irritated, I could see; and no sooner had the philosopher advanced this opinion of his, than Heatherleigh, with a sharp glance said—

'That is why you don't marry, I suppose—fearing the ties of consanguinity.'

Now there was a good deal more brutality than wit about this remark; but I constantly observed that, on this one subject of woman, Heatherleigh never would suffer in his presence the little affectations of cynicism which are common in ordinary talk. On any other topic it was absolutely impossible to stir him into anything like a temper. If you flatly contradicted every position he took up, and went dead against his most favourite opinions, he would lie with his head up in the air, and a quiet smile on his face, as if he were balancing your theory alongside his own on the point of his nose. He would play with your opinion as he played with his own, and would put it into comical lights with an easy grace and wit which were irresistible, because they were the offspring of a fine fancy and

a tender disposition. You might tickle him all over, and he would only smile; but when you spoke sneeringly of women (as many of his bachelor artist acquaintances were inclined to do) you pricked his eye, and then he would spring up and deal you a blow with the utmost savagery of which he was capable.

I wanted him to go home; but a message came at this moment to the effect that supper was ready. Heatherleigh insisted on my staying; because, he said, Bonnie Lesley had complained to him that I had run away from her, and because she expected me to take her in to supper.

'Is there anything particularly laughable in that?' I asked, seeing that there was a curious smile on his face.

He looked at me for a moment.

'Well,' he said, 'men like to see other men innocent and gullible, for it flatters

their own astuteness. Of course, too, it multiplies their chances of existence. But you are so very, very believing and simple, Ted, that you are a positive wonder. The Midianitish woman has already captured you, merely by staring at you.'

I was very vexed to find myself incapable of replying to his raillery; but it was on Miss Lesley's account that I was vexed. It seemed to me unfair that Heatherleigh should, even in joke, talk of Bonnie Lesley as of some interested and deceitful woman, and I could not help recalling my suspicion that something underlay this fun—that Heatherleigh had some cause to feel spiteful against her, and was thus revenging himself in a petty and unworthy way. Nor was this impression lessened by some chance remarks made by Miss Lesley herself, as I sat next her at supper.

'I don't believe,' she said, 'that artists

have souls. I believe that artists, and actors, and authors—all the people who have to live by art of any kind—sell their soul to the public, and leave none of it for home use. They can assume various characters, and pretend to have a regard for this or that, but it is only a pretence. They are empty inside. They have neither a soul nor a heart—they have sold both to the public, and live upon the result. Oh! I know it.'

'Do you mean——?'

'Look at Mr. Heatherleigh,' she continued. 'He could act being in love with any woman, and she might believe him, and yet I am certain that his profession has taken it out of his power to be seriously and honestly affectionate towards anybody in the world.'

'You are quite mistaken, then,' I said. 'You will meet with very few men who are

as generous and disinterested and affectionate as Heatherleigh.'

'Oh! I am so glad to hear you say that,' she replied, with that air of pretty wonder which was so irritating, for it left you in doubt as to whether she understood, or believed, or cared for what you had been saying.

But it seemed to me that she knew, or fancied she knew, something more of Heatherleigh than she chose to express, and I hoped that my true and honest friend had not suffered by some mischance in her estimation. Indeed, I ventured to press my opinion on the point, for it seemed to me almost painful that these two, who had so much that was beautiful and loveable about them, should be separated by some misunderstanding. She listened to all I had to say, and appeared deeply interested. Nor had I any desire to cut short my

speech, for it was an indescribable pleasure to me to watch everything I said reflected sympathetically in the large and expressive eyes. The various phases of attention and deprecation and astonishment that passed over them were so singularly beautiful. But a quiet astonishment was their normal expression, and it was so far normal that it seemed to answer what you were saying, when she herself was thinking of something else. She appeared to have some curiosity to hear what you said, and every new sentence seemed to convey another pretty little surprise to her, but in time you began to see that all your efforts to interest her only awoke the same result. It was not that she was preoccupied or absent. But she seemed so contented with herself (as surely she had a right to be), that she cared only for the pleasure of sitting still, and being tickled by small novelties of information. I grew to

wonder whether, if a lightning-bolt shot past her, and split the mantel-piece beyond, she would do more than turn the big, child-like eyes upon the place, and regard it with a bright and pleased curiosity.

On our way home Heatherleigh did not choose to speak about Miss Lesley, and I was rather glad of it. But he questioned me about Hester Burnham, and I told him minutely and accurately everything that had occurred.

'You are a perpetual conundrum to me,' he said; 'I can't make you out. I never saw such exaggerated self-depreciation joined to such insufferable pride.'

## CHAPTER VII.

### SOME OLD FRIENDS.

I FEAR it will be impossible for me to convey to the reader any sense of my great enjoyment when it first began to dawn upon me that I was really of use to Heatherleigh. Those who have been delicately brought up, with wide possibilities around them, with ease in money matters, and innumerable avenues of pleasurable activity lying in front of them, cannot understand how hard and gloomy and dismal was the pall which had hung over my life, and the presence of which had always seemed to be inevitable. And now there was a rent overhead, and a stirring of free wind; and a ray of Heaven's own

sunlight fell upon me, and found me without words to express my gratitude.

Heatherleigh, in his lazy way, used to make fun of me (in order to protect himself) whenever I ventured to hint of the debt I owed him. Generous to a fault, he shrank with an exceeding sensitiveness from being considered generous; and you could not have made him more uncomfortable than by showing him what you thought of his goodness. So I nursed my great debt towards him in my heart; and wondered if ever I should have the chance of revealing my respect and admiration and affection for this good man. I used to think that if he and I were to love the same woman, and she loved me, I should leave her, for his sake.

'What an irritating fellow you are!' he said to me, one day, when I was beseeching him to go on with some work, that I might

get something to do. 'Why can't you take life easily? Nobody will thank you—certainly not I—for worrying yourself to death.'

'But I cannot help it,' I said. 'Weasel put the notion into my blood—and it will always remain in it—that I ought never to be a moment idle in working-hours. I can't help it. I feel wretched unless when I am working; and if I sit talking to you, I have an uneasy feeling that some one may open the door, glide in on slippers, and scowl and scold. I never enjoy taking a walk in the day-time—I expect to see some one somewhere who will ask me why I am doing nothing while all men are working.'

'You are like some unfortunate wretch who has been all his life in prison, and who sickens and dies in free air for want of his ordinary employment of scraping the wall with his finger-nail.'

'This morning, coming down here at half-past ten, I saw Weasel in the street, and I half expected him to come up and ask why the devil I was so late, and if I wasn't ashamed to be cheating my master. Just now, I'd much rather work than sit talking like this.'

'Confound you, do you think I am going to pander to your diseased appetite? If you must work, work at home, and don't bother me.'

'I have been working at home.'

Then I told him all about it. I had been trying a picture on my own account for some months. I began it in the early part of the year, and, as the daylight widened, I rose earlier and earlier, until now I got between five and six hours at it every morning before I hurriedly swallowed my breakfast. I used to get up at four, paint until ten, and then eat something or other and be

down at Heatherleigh's studio by half-past. There were many reasons why I did not wish Heatherleigh to know about my labouring with this picture, chief of them being that I did not wish him to see it until it was in some sort presentable; although had I shown it to him, I might have spared myself an immense deal of toil and vexation. I was working without tools, to begin with. I had to place one chair on the top of another to form an easel; then the canvas was tied to the back of the upper chair by a bit of string, while I sat on a stool. The colours I had bought were of the cheapest kind; but I had acquired under Heatherleigh considerable experience in heightening and tempering dull or crude pigments. Of course, I had no models; but the recollection of form was always easy to me. And yet the amount of pain, physical and mental, that the incessant struggle with my own

ignorance and inexperience gave me, was indescribable. Again and again I painted portions over—here rubbing out the damp work of the previous day, there coating over what was too dry for that operation. It is conceivable that the canvas got into a deplorable state; and at last I drove a knife straight through it. It was my second effort at the same picture which was on the stocks when Heatherleigh spoke; and of it, such as it was, more may be said hereafter.

In the meantime, Heatherleigh besought me to moderate the vehemence of my labour. He professed himself unable even to supply sketches for me to fill up. He was growing too rich, he said—he should have to die and leave his wealth to the hospitals. More than one dealer owed him money—an unprecedented thing—which he had never asked for. And with that, he suddenly slapped his knee.

'Ted,' he said, 'I have a grand idea. Let's both put on a spurt for the next month or five weeks. The Lewisons are going down to Brighton in June; and you and I will go too—for a grand long holiday of magnificent laziness. We can make up by that time 200*l.*, I know; and we will go fair halves in it. Now don't blush like a school girl, whether you are vexed or pleased—you do three-fourths of the work and you ought at least to have half the money. Or we will have a common stock, if you like it better. Is it a bargain—five weeks' hard work, and then a month at the sea?'

The sea! I heard the sound of waves then, as clearly as I can hear them now, down on the beach there. As clearly as I behold it now, from this window, I looked through the mist that was before my eyes, and I saw the great, breezy, green sea in

the sunlight, with the joyous white laugh of its running waves.

Then I told Heatherleigh how there was not even a river down in the Missenden valley in which I had been brought up; how the farthest views you could get from the chalk hills only revealed extensions of a great cultivated plain; how the sea and all its strange associations—so different from those of the land, so beautiful, and wild, and terrible—produced a sort of delirium in me; and how even the remembrance of it was to me full of the sadness which is somehow interwoven with the beauty of all beautiful things.

We talked of Brighton then, and of the sea, and of what was to be done there. Miss Lesley was certain to be with the Lewisons. Perhaps the Burnhams would be down.

'I know several other people,' said Hea-

therleigh; 'they are all nice sort of people, who have the courage to leave the London season at its height, and catch the flush of the year at the seaside.'

I resolved, if it was to be our good fortune to go thither, that I would spend my holiday by the sea in my own fashion. It was not for me to visit the people with whom Heatherleigh would be thrown into contact. His good-nature would have it that I should accompany him when he did chance to go among grand people; but I never liked it. I considered myself as an impostor. I had no right to be there at all. I was received and talked to as an artist. I was no artist. The first evening I went to Mr. Lewison's house, Bonnie Lesley, by her pretty manner and engaging talk, made me forget everything and everybody; but I had gone there once or twice since, and felt that I ought not to have gone. Everybody

present had done something or other. There was the young poet whose praises all men were sounding—a mere boy—whose song of despairing and cheated love, sung in splendid English rhythm, had touched the oldest hearts; there was the man who was at the head of the classic revivalist school in painting; there was the girl whose future fame Gibson, the sculptor, had prophesied. What business had I there?

The very next day I had to go down Holborn; and I met Big Dick and the sleepy-headed Kent, who were on their way to their dinner. I went up and spoke to them, and I felt like an impostor with them also. Kent was very respectful, and I hated him for it. Big Dick was more natural, and talked pretty much in his usual fashion; but of course I had grown a good deal older since I was his apprentice, and there was a difference in his manner too.

'Let's go in to this doorway,' said Kent, glancing at my fine suit of grey clothes and my hat. (I was on a diplomatic errand for Heatherleigh, and had got out of the ordinary slouching studio-costume.) 'You won't care to be seen with the likes of us.'

'Don't be a fool,' I said, rather angrily, and kept standing in the middle of the pavement.

I was debating in my own mind how I could offer them something to drink without appearing to be ostentatious (for I knew they were rather sensitive on that matter of treating, which is a point of honour among working-men) when Big Dick, having more moral courage than I, proposed (and I was heartily glad) that he should stand something. The doorway which Kent wished to shelter him led into a chop-house, in which there was also a bar; so as we were going in, I said—

'What do you say to our all dining here, instead of your going home?'

'All right,' said both of them; and so we went in and sat down.

They asked me to order the dinner, and I did: a very good dinner—mutton chops, vegetables, gooseberry pie, and bottled stout.

'Well, I'm d——d glad to see you, Ted,' said Big Dick, shaking my hand again with his great horny fist, 'only I suppose we must call you Mr. Ives, eh?'

'You may if you like, Mr. Richard Primer,' said I—at which profound joke Kent laughed consumedly.

'And what a change there is in you!' said Dick. 'Why you were a poor little fellow when I knew you—all eyes, you know, and looking as if you was afraid everybody wanted to eat you. And now you've grown tall and straight, and the

worst of you I can say is as you look too like a b—— Frenchman or Italian. But that comes through your way of life now, I dare say.'

Kent had been looking at me stedfastly for some time with a sort of wonder in his sleepy eyes. At last he said, cautiously and with nervous politeness—

'I hope we're not detaining of you.'

'I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Kent,' I said, nettled beyond endurance; and this woke him up somewhat, for by-and-by he said, when the stout had warmed him a little—

'You'll be marrying presently, and then there'll be Mrs. Ives, as well as Mr. Ives, and lots of little Iveses.'

With that Kent stretched his grey eyes to their uttermost, endeavouring to control his merriment; and then half shut them again,

and abandoned himself to a roar of laughter over his wit.

'But I've good news for you, Ted,' said Dick, laying down his tumbler. 'There's an awful revolution round there at Weasel's. Weasel used to be a great man to you—I know you was frightened of him. Ha! you should see Weasel now. He's married—married a big, strapping woman as warms him, I can tell ye, when he get's into a bad temper. There's no cantankerousness 'll do for her. She can give him a hot un when she likes; and the scoldin's all the other way now. Of course he's the same to us—mayhap he revenges hisself on us for what he gets from her; but doesn't he get it! She comes down to the shop and lays about her like a good un; and Weasel, with his whitey-brown face, stands and bites his lips, and then drives the things about when

she's gone. Lord bless ye! he can't call his soul his own.'

'He never could,' I said. 'If he has one, he must have borrowed or stolen it.'

Well, I don't see anything particularly brilliant in that remark; but its effect upon Kent was alarming. He had been drinking a good deal of bottled stout; and what I said about Weasel's soul sent him into a prodigious fit of laughter, with which doubtless the beer had something to do. He laughed till the tears ran down his face; and then something stuck in his throat, and he gasped, and laughed, and coughed until he was blood-red. Seeing that he was in the same good-humour when he recovered, I proposed that we should have a pint bottle of old port with our cheese, to which they agreed; and before the dinner was over, we had entirely established our ancient relations.

'I'm proud of ye, Ted,' said Kent, whose lazy grey eyes had never been so excited for years, 'and I say as you are a credit to the shop that brought you up. And we'll dance at your wedding.'

Then came the question of paying. I said, carelessly, that I should much prefer to pay for the whole; but I saw by Dick's face that he was a little hurt by the proposal, and he dissented from it in rather a stiff and formal way.

'Come, then,' I said, 'let's toss for it.'

Now there is a favourite trick among the Missenden boys (and probably among boys elsewhere) by which you can toss up a penny, put it between your hands, feel with your thumb whether tail or head is uppermost, and change the coin according to what your opponent calls. I was never very dexterous at this piece of juvenile leger-de-main; but I succeeded in convincing both

Big Dick and Kent that I had lost both times, and so they let me pay the small bill. It was a very pleasant dinner, that in the Holborn chop-house: I have since then risen from many a grander banquet having enjoyed myself considerably less. When we parted, I believe Kent was in such good spirits that, at my request, he would have gone straight into the shop and challenged Weasel to a hand-to-hand fight.

However, to return to this projected trip to the sea. As I was going home that evening I met Polly Whistler; she turned and walked up Hampstead Road with me, and I told her what Heatherleigh and I proposed to do. Polly's face grew a trifle thoughtful for a moment; and then she said, with what seemed to me a rather affected carelessness.

'I suppose Mr. Heatherleigh expects to meet people he knows down there — the Lewisons, perhaps?'

'Yes, he does.'

'And that girl, Miss Lesley?'

Polly was looking hard at the ground.

'Yes, I think she will be there also.'

'I suppose Mr. Heatherleigh means to marry her?'

'Marry her!' I said, in astonishment, and —shall I confess it?—with a sharp touch of pain.

'Why not?' she said, with a smile that was peculiarly unlike her ordinary frank smile.

'Don't you know the manner in which he always talks of her?' I asked—'quite unfairly, I know; but still he does it.'

'That is only his way,' she said. 'He never likes you to know that he is fond of anything or anybody, and makes fun over it in order to hide himself. If he were dreadfully in love, and going to be married to-morrow morning, he would spend to-night

in satirising us poor women-folks as hard as he could.'

'Then he is not dreadfully in love, for he never attempts anything of the kind.'

'But you say he talks in that way about Miss Lesley. Now, what sort of a girl is she?'

So, as we went on, I told her all I knew of Bonnie Lesley, and of her fine and handsome appearance, her childlike and winning ways, and her kindness to myself. Polly listened very attentively, and put two or three questions the drift of which I could not quite catch. Then she grew a little more cheerful.

'You are likely to be dreadfully spoiled by women, Ted,' she remarked.

'Why?'

'I don't know. There's something about your manner—something desperately direct and honest—that provokes one's confidence.

Don't you remember I talked to you immediately after I saw you just as I would talk to you now? And so this Miss Lesley has been making great friends with you. What does she say about Mr. Heatherleigh?'

'Nothing. I think there is some misunderstanding between them. He is constantly gibing at her, and making epigrams about her; and she is very cautious in mentioning him at all.'

'I'm glad you and he get so pleasant a subject to talk about all day. It must be such a variety from the constant talking shop that you men are so fond of. We women never get a chance of talking shop —unless when we talk about babies.'

Polly said this in the most artless manner, but in a second she had caught herself up, crimsoned deeply, and then burst out laughing. To hide her confusion she stooped and

picked up a pin that happened to be lying on the pavement.

'There,' she said, showing me the pin (though there was still a laugh lurking about the corners of her mouth), 'how many times have I laid the foundation for a fortune! You know the stories of the industrious young men who picked up a pin, and then heaps of money came to them through it. But here have I been picking up pins for years in the expectation of getting only a small competency, and it never comes. What are you laughing at?'

'At your ill-luck in never getting a fortune,' I said, boldly; wherewith she laughed too.

Having once got into these good spirits, she rattled on like a mad thing. She took my arm, and we strolled along carelessly towards Hampstead, she all the while telling stories, and making the oddest remarks about

the people passing, and laughing in her quiet and discreet fashion. First she began about a lady in her neighbourhood, a widow, who was famous for the number of her suitors and the rapidity with which they were changed. She described the various lovers, and their mode of making love; although I am positive she never was inside the house, nor heard one of them speak.

'The one she has got just now,' continued Polly, 'is the smallest man, I believe, in the world—so small, and thin, and pale. I used to call him the widow's mite; and she heard of it, and said she would teach me better manners if she laid her hands on me.'

This led up to another experience of Polly's. She had been going on a bitterly cold winter night to visit some one at Stamford Hill; and after the omnibus was packed, a rather good-looking young girl appeared at the door, and looked in,

'Come in,' said an elderly gentleman, 'Come in, my girl, and you can sit on my knee till you get out.'

Rather than wait half-an-hour in the cold, the girl, blushing a little, did as she was bid, and was subjected to a good deal of quiet and harmless joking by the passengers, who were going home to their suburban houses, and all of whom knew the old gentleman who was so complaisant to the new-comer. He himself was very good-natured and jocular, and made some remote hints about his wishing that he was not married.

'Then,' said Polly, 'the old gentleman asked her where she meant to get out. "Clarence Lodge," she says. "Why," he says, "that's my house!" "Are you Mr. Sandemann?" she asks. "Yes," he says, beginning to look uncomfortable. "Then I'm your new servant, sir," she says, and

you may imagine how all the gentlemen roared. But did you ever notice, Ted, that in getting into a 'bus, or anywhere, women are far less courteous to each other than men are to each other? Men seem to have some idea of fairness, and let the first-comers go in; but women will squeeze and elbow, and push themselves foremost in defiance of justice. Of course one of the fine ladies you visit wouldn't do that. She would let anybody who had the vulgarity to take precedence, take it, and would only show her contempt with the tip of her nose. I am beginning to think that all fine ladies are my natural enemies.'

'But you ought to love your enemies, Polly,' I said.

'Oh! it's very easy to love your enemies,' she said, 'when they don't do anything to you. I have no objection to loving them at present. Indeed, I'm in love with every-

body just now—I'd forgive that old widow for her threat—I'd let her marry Tom Thumb if it wasn't bigamy, or I'd let her flirt, and never say a word about it, with a man two hundred feet above the level of the sea.'

With this sort of nonsense (which gained not a little from Polly's bright eyes, and her low delightful laugh), an hour or two passed very pleasantly, and it was getting towards dusk when we came down Hampstead Road again. I thought there was something more in that vague dislike to fine ladies that lay on the surface of her foolish talk, and I noticed that Polly more than once turned the conversation towards Bonnie Lesley. She was careful about what she said, but indirectly she uttered some rather cutting speeches about this poor girl, who seemed to be more suspected the less she was known. Polly had not even seen her.

And, having cogitated over the matter, I, in my wisdom, evolved these propositions, to account for the mystery.

1. Heatherleigh has been, and perhaps is, in love with Miss Lesley.

2. She has refused him, and promised to keep the secret.

3. He is vexed, and makes epigrams about her fickleness, simply because he happened to be in love, and she wasn't.

4. Polly is in love with Heatherleigh, and, without having seen her, is jealous of Bonnie Lesley, and consequently spiteful.

There were some few points which did not seem to me to square with this theory, but it was the best guess I could make at the position.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### POLLY'S MOTHER.

I THREW myself into that five weeks' work with all the energy of which I was capable. Look at the splendid prize that was to recompense our labour. To Heatherleigh a month at the seaside was nothing; to me it was a treasure perpetual, inexhaustible. While I worked I dreamed of it. That gaunt and dusty chamber in Granby Street seemed to smell of seaweed, and the stillness of it was like the murmur of a shell. People who have repeatedly spent a month at the seaside, know how short a period it is, but I looked forward with a

kind of wonder to the idea of rising morning after morning, and still finding oneself confronted by the great width of water. I liked the labour, and I liked what was coming after it. At present, the excitement and the interest of hard work; in the future a blaze of sunlight, and tingling breezes, and the glories of the sea.

And it was during this period, too, that I first definitely saw that my work was of some value to my benefactor and friend. Not only did I do the greater portion of most of the pictures, but I goaded him into what work he did undertake. But for me, I think the scheme would have been abandoned. Many a time I went up in the morning, and found him lounging in his easy chair, absorbed in one of his favourite treatises.

'I don't think I shall go on with that picture to-day,' he would say; 'what is the

use of bothering? Let us go down to Rotten Row and stare at the people.'

Then I would remonstrate, and remind him of our compact.

'You are the most uncompromising, persistent, stiff-necked brute I ever met. What is the use of life, if you must subject yourself to all sorts of needless martyrdoms? You will worry yourself now, and, when you find yourself at Brighton with nothing to do, idleness will drive you mad.'

'Idleness hasn't driven somebody else mad whom I know,' I said.

'You haven't enough of reflection in you to know that the intentional idleness you propose to have at Brighton would be a nuisance, while the chance idleness you take at the suggestion of a whim is always charming. So soon as a man is over-conscious that he is doing something, the enjoyment of it flies. I have a notion that

you could make one of those mad harlequin-dancers miserable, by getting him to read a treatise on anatomy. Indeed you would destroy his chances of living. Show him all the delicate mechanism of the bones and sinews, and he could never afterwards fling his limbs into contorted forms, without a vague fear which would render the performance a failure.'

Now, if I had let him go on, there would have been no more work that day. He would start some such subject, and pursue it through all its phases, comic and serious and practical, with his hands crossed on the crown of his head, and his legs stretched out and crossed in front of him. As I have said, he had no sort of interest in painting as painting. To him it was merely a profession which yielded him an easy life, plenty of leisure in which to indulge his habit of indolent day-dreaming and listless

speculation, and as much money as kept him comfortably, or allowed him to be generous when he wished.

Something else in this book had struck him; and he was anxious to explain to me how the writer was wrong in assuming that civilisation would in time work frightful mischief by developing the cerebrum at the expense of the cerebellum.

'That's all very well,' I said, 'but——'

'It is absurd,' he persisted. 'The physical conditions of life will prevent it. So long as men have got to contend with cold and rain, and the toil and exposure of agricultural work, the race will never so exclusively cultivate its intellectual powers as to improve itself off the earth. It seems to me——'

With that, I sat down at his easel (not mine) and began working at the picture. But I had been merely a dummy listener;

he continued his meditations all the same, and it was only when I began to meddle with the face of his heroine (a very good likeness of Polly) that he started up, and took his palette and brushes in hand.

'After we get down to the sea-side,' I said, 'I will lie on the beach, if you like for hours, and listen to everything you have to say about harlequins, or priests, or philosophers.'

'You have the determination of ——,' he said, naming a historical personage who may have been determined, but who was notoriously unsuccessful.

At length the time drew near; and, although we had not got in all the money, it was worked for and available. Heatherleigh, having taken down some cheques to be cashed, came back with a pocketful of bank notes. He counted them out—one hundred and sixty pounds odd—and then

he quietly told off eighty of these and placed the money before me on the table.

I was the possessor of eighty pounds in hard cash—it was my own, my very own.

'Heatherleigh,' I said, 'let us have a walk through Kensington Gardens, and round the Serpentine.'

'Why, you positively love the Serpentine, I believe, you abominable Cockney. And you going to the sea to-morrow!'

Nevertheless we went; and as we drew near the small lake, the sun had set in the north-west, and after the red light had quite faded down, there was a strange pale 'after-glow' in the sky, while a gathering mist fell over the water, causing the opposite shore and its trees to recede into a vague, ethereal distance. I had grown to love the Serpentine in the old days of my bondage, when I used to steal out alone in the evening, and sit on the cold wooden seats, as

the stillness of the night fell. And now, as we walked across the damp grass, the various sounds of the day ceased, and the place was solitary and quiet; while the wandering white of the fog settled thicker over the further side of the lake, and through it we saw the far gas-lamps burning sharp and red. Then, as we lingered awhile, a strange golden moonlight crept up the skies and made the faint streaks of the clouds visible; while it touched the trees also, and glimmered, a trembling line of yellow light, along the shore. You forgot that you were near a great city, and the poor Serpentine became lonely, mystic, magical.

Did Heatherleigh guess why I wished to come hither? Many a time, in the old days, I had wandered round the small lake, empty-hearted and empty-pocketed. In all my dreams, did I ever anticipate that within a year or two I should walk over that damp

grass, and round that mystical shore, my own master, with the art that I had loved as an amusement now become the sole occupation of my life, with a future full of freedom and beautiful possibilities before me, with eighty pounds of savings clasped tightly in my pocket?

'What are you thinking of?' said Heatherleigh.

'Of the power that this money gives me. Couldn't I live for a whole year, doing anything or nothing just as I liked, upon it? I could set eighty wretched creatures wild with delight by giving them a sovereign a-piece. I could take fifty pounds of it, and buy a small, little brooch, with curious stones in it, and I could send it, without being known——'

'To whom?' said Heatherleigh.

Then I burst out laughing; for I knew it was time the farce should end.

'Here,' I said, 'take the money. I have no right to it. I wanted to have the sensation of having it, and of coming down here to crow over the notions that Weavle used to give me.'

He refused to take it.

'I won't have it,' I said, simply enough, 'because you know as well as I do that I have no right whatever to it.'

'Well,' he said, 'you are still to me that perpetual conundrum that I can't make out. Where were you born, Ted? Had you a father and mother? I believe you are a sort of will-o'-the-wisp—there's no catching you. You have the courage and determination and self-reliance of half-a-dozen men, and you have the sensitiveness, and finical, particular, humbugging nonsense of a thousand girls; and all this confusion of character you exhibit with a simplicity which astounds me. Brought up as you have been,

you should be as hard as steel, cautious, keen, avaricious——'

But I need not follow him into his theory about the manner in which I had come to develope those wonderful qualities he had discovered. When he finished, we were still walking round the Serpentine; and the moonlight was now full and clear in the skies.

'That bodes well for to-morrow,' said he.

'But,' said I, 'you haven't taken the money. If you like, I will accept ten pounds of it; and let the rest go into our general fund for house-keeping at Brighton.'

To this he agreed; and next day we proceeded to get our things in readiness for starting. Polly Whistler called round in the forenoon; and then I persuaded her to go out with me and help me to purchase, with the ten pounds, a dress for my mother. We

went to a big place in Tottenham Court Road, and Polly was quite grand in her manner as she insisted upon seeing pretty nearly everything in the shop. At last, she confessed herself pleased; and the parcel was ordered to be sent on by the Burnham coach to its destination.

Further, I persuaded Polly to dine with us, and, finally, to come and see us off.

'It is a heart-breaking thing to part with you, Ted,' she remarked; 'but we must teach ourselves to suffer. Besides, my old woman is a little wild to-day; and then I like to give her the house to herself.'

'She has been trying to keep you in order, Polly,' said Heatherleigh, strapping down his portmanteau.

'And she *can* keep people in order,' said Polly. 'If she had been Nebuchadnezzar's wife, she 'd have made him pare his nails precious smart!'

I could not help admiring the good-natured way in which the girl joked about this affair, which was certainly no laughing-matter to her. To listen to her, you would have imagined that her mother's only fault was a certain impatience of people who did wrong, and a desire to have her own way in ordering her house. Polly said nothing of the persecution and insults, and often bodily pain, she suffered at the hands of that bad old woman, whose drunken madness had long ago made her forget that she was a mother.

There was some commission which Heatherleigh had undertaken that prevented our catching the afternoon express. There was nothing for it but to sit in patience, with our portmanteaus at our feet, waiting for the recusant messenger, the while Polly chatted and laughed, and pretended to make love to me.

Our fooling was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a loud voice on the stairs—a woman's voice, shrill, angry, intoxicated. How it flashed across me that this must be Polly's mother I don't know; but I shall never forget the quick gesture and look of the girl when she heard the noise. She instinctively caught my arm, as if for protection, while she darted a terrified, anxious glance towards Heatherleigh. It was as though she had cried to me, 'Ted, save me, and don't let *him* know!' In that brief second, the whole nature of the girl was revealed; and I said to myself, 'She loves him with her whole heart.'

Instantaneous as was the warning given, and dumb as were her directions, I had sufficient presence of mind to go quickly to the door. I went outside, and shut the door behind us. The woman was on the stairs, directing the fury of her speech, along with much

gesticulation, upon a maidservant, who, from underneath, was protesting against the strange visitor going up-stairs unannounced. My appearance on the scene turned the flood of her wrath upon me.

'I've got you, have I? I thought it was here you'd be found; and it's time I had a chance of speakin' hout. You're Mr. Heatherleigh's friend, are you; and what have you done with my daughter? I say, what have you done with my poor girl, that's bein' made a byword of among a pack of wolves. Oh, don't pretend to pacify me —I heard o' your goin's on this morning, and buyin' a dress for a respectable girl as belongs to a family as 'zpectable as yours. And are you not ashamed of yourself, sir— my poor lamb among them wolves. But I'll have the law on you, I will, I will, I will!'

'Don't be a fool,' I said, 'hold your

tongue, and come downstairs, and tell me what you want.'

'Is my daughter in that room?' she screamed, at the pitch of her shrilly voice.

'If you don't be quiet, I'll have you turned out of the house,' I said, and then added—determined to avert the shame of an exposure from poor Polly—'Is it money you want? I will give it to you, only don't make such a hideous noise.'

'Merciful 'eavens!' she yelled; 'he wants to buy me as he has bought my daughter. Oh, the wretch! Oh, the vile, wicked, traitorous——'

I caught her by the arm; as I thought she was going to tumble down the stairs.

'Would you lay hands on me? You think you'll buy me——'

'Why, you old humbug, I wouldn't give twopence for a dozen of you,' I said, when I

saw it was impossible to restrain her violence by persuasion.

With that she caught me by the coat, dashed past me like a wild-cat, and entered the room. I followed; and whatever there may have been of absurdity or comicality in the old woman's ravings on the stair, was forgotten now in what I saw before me. Polly stood motionless, her face bent down and quite pale. Her lips were trembling; but that expressed only a tithe of the humiliation and shame that seemed to cover her whole figure. She had heard what had been going on outside; and she stood there absolutely stupified and speechless by the cruel shame and mortification that she must have long dreaded. Heatherleigh stood at the other end of the room, with a look of wonder on his face that soon gave way to indignation and anger. For the old woman at first confronted her daughter, and made

such speeches as I need not write down here. It is not a pleasant thing to hear a mother mouthing out lies against the character of her daughter, wounding her at her most sensitive points, and outraging even the bystanders' sense of decency. She spoke so rapidly, too, that the mischief was done before either of us could interfere; but Heatherleigh, with a quick flush on his face, went forward and caught her by the shoulder.

'You shameless creature,' he said, 'do you know what you are doing?'

Here Polly, still looking down, came forward and interposed between them.

'Mr. Heatherleigh, she is my mother,' said the girl, now crying very bitterly. 'Mother, come away.'

But the infuriated woman drove her aside, and held her ground; while she confronted us with an intoxicated stare.

'Good-bye, Ted,' said Polly to me, holding out her hand. Then, I think, she directed one furtive glance towards Heatherleigh, and went away. The mother remained behind.

'Good-bye,' I had said to her, knowing that it was the last time she would ever enter that room, in which we had spent so many innocent and happy evenings.

'Do you know what you have done, you foolish old idiot? Do you know what you have done?' said Heatherleigh, with his face full of mortification and anger. 'Do you know that you have tried to destroy the character of an honest and industrious girl, who has hitherto kept you and indulged your beastly habits? Do you know that you may have sickened her of her honest life? Do you know what has happened within the last few minutes—that you have outraged the feelings of a sensitive girl, whom you

ought to have protected; and may God forgive you if anything comes of your drunken insanity!'

He snatched his hat, and hastily went out. It was half an hour afterwards when he returned. By that time the old woman had gone. Heatherleigh's words had partly sobered her; she had begged my forgiveness, and burst into a flood of alcoholic tears. When Heatherleigh came back, I noticed that he was rather pale, and there was a thoughtful, fixed look in his face.

All the way down in the train he scarcely spoke. Neither of us cared to read by the light of the dingy carriage-lamp; and so we lay and stared out into the dusk. There was a faint light outside, owing to the moon, but the moon herself remained hidden.

Presently he said to me, looking up from his reverie—

'Did you ever hear or see anything like that?'

I knew what he meant; and I said—

'It is the last time Polly will ever be in that room.'

'I followed her,' he said. 'I overtook her; and, do you know, she would scarcely speak to me. The poor girl seemed quite dazed and bewildered—no wonder. I could have strangled that incoherent old idiot who went raving on and seeing nothing of what she was doing. And yet Polly should not have been so much put out. When I told her we all understood that her mother was talking nonsense, she said nothing but that I was to go back again, and leave her to go home alone. I don't understand it.'

'I shouldn't wonder if Polly never spoke to you any more,' I said.

'Why?' he asked with a quick glance of surprise.

'I don't know. I don't think she ever will.'

The apartments which Heatherleigh had secured for us were in King's Road, and therefore fronting the sea. But as we drove down from the station and round to the house, I could see nothing but a dusky grey where the sea ought to have been. I heard the murmur of it, however, far away, like innumerable strange voices.

Supper was prepared for us. Afterwards, Heatherleigh smoked a solitary pipe almost in total silence; and then we retired to our respective rooms. Mine was a small chamber, near the top of the house, fronting the sea. I could not sleep for that strange noise, that seemed so wild and distant and yet so sadly familiar. I must have lain and tossed about for a couple of hours or so, I think; and then I began to perceive that the room was full of light, and on the wall, near the

window, the moon was gleaming in slanting squares.

I got up and went to the window; and involuntarily I uttered a cry of astonishment and joy. The world outside was all aglow with moonlight of a soft and greenish-yellow hue, the large, full moon herself hanging up there over the sea and throwing a great, broad lane of glittering light on the water. Every object was sharply and clearly defined; from the palings along the parade and the boats on the grey beach to the fleet of fishing-smacks whose black hulls lay and rolled in the flood of moonlight. And I could see the waves now—tiny waves that came gently in, and broke over with a murmur which was repeated and echoed in the intense stillness of the night. The picture was magical, wonderful. I listened to the sound of the waves, and gazed upon the splendid pathway of silver that lay and

quivered on the great grey plain of the sea, until I was numbed with cold. Then I hastily dressed myself, sneaked downstairs, opened the door of the house stealthily, and was outside.

There was not a human being abroad at that hour; this whole, beautiful world was mine. I walked away from the houses—westward, past the chain pier, the dark masses of which were touched with the moonlight, and past those long terraces of tall buildings that gleamed grey and ghost-like in the silence of the night. I wandered on, along the smooth turf of the cliffs, meeting no one but some solitary coast-guardsman—a black figure seen vaguely against the grey-green of the sea. The moon was at my back now, but all around was the wonderful, calm, clear light; and so I walked on until I stood over Rottingdean,

the small hamlet that lay dark and silent under the throbbing eastern stars.

Here I went down on the beach. The tide was some distance out; and there came a breezy odour of sea-weed from those patches of rock out there, among which the pools of water glimmered white. I lay down on the shingle, under the great cliffs, that echoed back the long rush of the waves on the shore. I could now see the distant lamps of Brighton, the black line of the pier, the specks of fishing-boats, and the moon that seemed to belong to that side of the picture; while before me stretched the vague and mystical sea, and overhead dwelt the silence of those splendid constellations that were now growing faint and wan. Was that the famous jewel of the Harp that gleamed so palely up there? The twisted snakes of Cerberus were cold and dead; and the flam-

ing points that used to stud the aërial harness of Pegasus were scarcely visible. Hercules himself seemed sick and pale in the moonlight; or was it another strange light that now began to show in the east, bringing with it a stirring of cold wind? I know that when I returned to Brighton, and got into the house again and tumbled into bed, a glow of pale saffron was shining along the level coast by Shoreham and Worthing; while high up in the east there were flakes of red in the sky, and all the new motion of the dawn.

## CHAPTER IX.

### LEWES CASTLE.

I AWOKE in a torrent of adjectives. Heatherleigh was standing by my bedside, heaping reproaches on me for lying so long on such a morning, when, as was evident from the great splatches of sunlight on the wall of the room, the weather was lovely. He was dressed remarkably well—in a fashion which set off his handsome figure; and you would have failed entirely to recognise in this tall and gentlemanly-looking man with the accurate gloves, the easily negligent tie, and the large brown beard which was exactly that of the 'swell' of that time, the indolent student-painter who a few days before was

lounging about a dirty room in Granby Street in shabby clothes, with unkempt hair, no collar, and an old wooden pipe. The odd thing was that in either case there was not the least self-conscious assumption. He was as natural in the one condition as the other; although I think he greatly enjoyed the sudden contrast of these twin modes of living, and went to extremes in both to increase his pleasure.

'Why, it is past twelve,' he said, 'I have been riding with Bonnie Leslie since half past ten. Ah! I thought I'd wake you up with that bit of news. Fancy our having been at Rottingdean while you were lying asleep, like a pig, in broad daylight.'

'I was at Rottingdean this morning before either of you,' I said; and then I told him how I had wandered about all night.

'Madness! my boy, madness!' he said.

'But come, dress yourself smartly; you are due at the Lewisons' at one, for lunch; and Miss Lesley sends you her kind regards, and hopes you will spend the afternoon with her. That is a compliment, mind you; for she is holding quite a court down here.'

'I hope you have made friends with her again,' I said.

'Oh, Bonnie Leslie and I have always been friends—of a kind,' he said.

When I went downstairs, and went to the front window, the world of Brighton was out driving and riding and walking in the glowing sunlight, while a gentle sea-breeze came over the far blue plain, and brought with it coolness, and the odour of sea-weed, and the plash of the waves on the beach. What a gay and brilliant company it was, to be sure—the twos and threes of ladies who lay lazily and proudly in their phaetons and landaus; the packs of rosy-cheeked girls who

cantered past on horseback, accompanied by a riding-master or their papa; the incessant strolling backwards and forwards of men and women dressed in the extreme of fashion, and having the air about them of the superiority of conscious wealth and beauty. This was the world which I was asked to enter—I, a waif and stray, a nobody, an insignificant fraction of that other world of hard work and narrow means, of small hopes and few enjoyments. I did enter it, almost against my inclination; and I saw for the first time how these rich and beautiful people passed day after day, week after week—the round of brilliant pleasures they enjoyed, the gay scenes and pleasant excitements which were always pressing upon them, their courteous ways and manners, their kindness, amiability, frivolity. Anybody acquainted with the ordinary life of fashionable people could describe it in a few

words; but to me it was all new and wonderful.

At one o'clock we presented ourselves at the Lewisons'. There were a number of people there; and they were quite different from the people I had met at their house before. The æsthetic element was nearly wholly absent. Instead of sculptors, and authors, and what not, the party consisted of very grand people who happened to be visiting Brighton—among them a viscount. I looked at this gentleman with awe. He was a small, thin, grey-haired man, who paid particular attention to his plate, and muttered to himself his comments on what other people were saying. His wife was a young and pretty woman, who exhibited all the little coquetries of a girl, and was especially amiable to Heatherleigh, beside whom she sat. I sat between her and Miss Lesley; and when the viscountess happened to say

something to me, which she did with a smile that made you fancy you had known her for years, I was in great straits to know whether I should, in answering her, address her by her title. As I was not quite sure, however, what that was, I forbore; and hoped I was not guilty of some appalling rudeness.

But for my being beside Bonnie Lesley, perhaps I should have been overwhelmed by this assemblage of grand people. No sooner, however, had we re-established our old relations with each other, and these consisted of many little secret understandings, which were very pleasant to ourselves, than I forgot all about the other persons present. She and I talked exclusively with each other, despite the efforts of one or two gentlemen to engage her in conversation across the table. I noticed that more than one of them regarded me with a stare of stolid surprise, when she persistently turned and talked to me in her confidential way.

'You have no other companion, then, down here than Heatherleigh?' she asked.

'No.'

'Don't you find him dull at times?'

'Never. He is the best companion I could wish for.'

'How strange!' she said, with a pretty smile. 'But, even if he is so pleasant a companion, you can't always go about with him. You will see him captured by somebody when lunch is over; and he will be taken off to drive with some of those ladies. So shall I, probably; or perhaps some of those gentlemen over there will thrust themselves upon us. Now, what do you say to our going off at once, the moment they rise from table? The mail-phaeton is to be round in a few minutes: what if we slip downstairs, and go off without warning?'

'Nothing could be better.'

'You won't be afraid if I drive?'

'Certainly not. But you need not drive, unless you like. I have had lots of experience with horses in the country.'

'Thank you, but I am passionately fond of driving; and as they never will let me take out those horses by myself, I mean to secure them to-day by stratagem.'

So it was arranged; and I was delighted with the arrangement, not expecting that it would lead to a little scene. The moment we were free, she and I slipped out of the room, and I went downstairs, while she went to change her attire. The carriage was there, and I had had sufficient acquaintance with the horses at Burnham House to see that one of the pair harnessed to this phaeton was rather a restive animal, which the groom was trying as well as he could to pacify. Presently Bonnie Lesley appeared, with a flush of pleasure on her fine face. More than one passer-by turned to look at

her as she got up into the high seat, and took the reins in her fingers, while the other hand, small and tightly gloved, held the whip in the most artistic fashion. Suddenly Heatherleigh came running down.

'Really, Miss Lesley, you must not——'

'I will,' she said, rapidly and in a low voice, while she cut at the neck of the restive horse with her whip. The animal would have sprung forward; but Heatherleigh had rushed to its head (displacing the groom) and tried to hold it. Of course the horse plunged and reared.

'I tell you, Miss Lesley,' said Heatherleigh, 'you will kill yourself and him, too.'

The girl's face turned white with a spasm of anger.

'Are you afraid?' she said to me, abruptly.

'No.'

'Will you go with me?'——

'Certainly.'

With that she made a cut at the neck of the near horse with her whip, and then caught the other, which Heatherleigh was holding, over the ear. Both horses sprung forward, nearly knocking him to the ground; and the next minute we were dashing madly along the Parade, while Miss Lesley sat cold and firm, without moving a muscle.

Then she burst into a laugh of downright, unaffected merriment.

'I hope I didn't knock him over; but I half expected he would come out, and I was determined to have my own way for once. I am so very much obliged to you for coming; and I will take the greatest care of you. No, you needn't laugh: I fancy you looked afraid when you got up.'

'If I had been afraid,' I said, 'I should have been none the less delighted to come.'

'Why?'

She withdrew her eyes for a moment from the horses' heads and fixed them on my face with her ordinary look of bright wonder. Under other circumstances I might have felt embarrassed by this awkward question; but driving through the cool wind, in the brilliant sunlight, and perched up beside the handsomest woman in Brighton, who could have failed to acquire some boldness?

'The pleasure of being beside you might make one risk a much greater danger than this; and you knew that when you asked me to come.'

She laughed a charming and unaffected little laugh, and was evidently greatly pleased—why, I was, long afterwards, to find out.

'Shall we turn and drive back along the Parade and the King's Road?'

'As you like.'

'People will stare at us, if I drive.'

'Why should you care?'

'There are such a lot of carriages out at this time.'

'Come,' I said, 'confess that you want me to urge you to do it—and I do.'

She wheeled round the horses very cleverly; and soon we were again clattering along the Parade. When we got into the thick of the carriages in the King's Road, it was astonishing to see the number of people, mostly gentlemen, who bowed to her. Every one looked at her—as well they might; for in all that brilliant throng there was neither girl nor woman to be compared with her. Her dress, too, I admit, was rather calculated to attract notice. She wore a sailor's jacket, of some beautiful, white, soft substance, touched here and there with blue; a sailor's hat, of gleaming white, with

a blue ribbon round it; and a pair of pale blue gloves which were conspicuous enough as she held the reins and whip. But you should have seen how the wind had stirred the blood in her peach-like cheek—how the sunlight caught here and there the great masses of her splendid yellow hair, and how the excitement had brightened and kindled her big eyes—to know why the sedate ladies in their phaetons, and the timid girls on their cantering hacks, and the indolent young gentlemen who stood on the steps of this or that hotel, were forced to forget their manners, and turn and stare at Bonnie Lesley.

'There is Mr. Heatherleigh,' she said to me.

He was seated in an open carriage, with two ladies and another gentleman. As they approached, I saw that one of the ladies was the viscountess whom I had seen at

lunch, and I supposed that the gentleman opposite her was her husband. He and Heatherleigh had their backs towards us, and, of course, could not see us; but the two ladies, who could not have failed to distinguish Miss Lesley even at some distance off, pretended to see nothing of her, and passed her by without any sign of recognition.

I noticed a slight shadow of mortification cross my companion's face.

'I am getting tired of this. What do you say to going for a short drive into the country?'

Having made some enquiries about the horses of the man who was in the small box behind, it was finally arranged that we should drive to Lewes. I was glad to get away from that crowded thoroughfare, and into the sweet-smelling country roads. The summer was at its brightest and greenest; and we had no sooner left the town, and got

into the quiet of meadows and corn-fields than Miss Lesley regained her equanimity and began to talk in her usual cheerful and confidential way. Indeed, I was very much struck by the rapid fashion in which vexations passed off her mind. While she had been bitterly angry with Heatherleigh at the moment of starting, three seconds had sufficed to chase away her resentment and restore her ordinary good-nature. Her temper was like a delicately balanced pair of scales: a touch of your finger would produce a great disturbance, but the disturbance never lasted above a moment.

What a pleasant drive it was, through the cool avenues of trees, and out again into the glare of the sunlight, with the broad white road lying like a line of silver between the dark-green meadows and fields. Here and there they had begun to cut the tall clover, and from the cleared portions of the fields

the piles of grey-green hay sent us the warm, sweet odour which makes the summer gracious. But for the most part the grass was still standing; and the light breeze that went over it stirred the smooth velvet plain into waves of shimmering grey, while it rustled across the great corn-fields and swayed the as yet unripe ears of the wheat. The country was as still and silent as the unfathomable blue that stretched overhead; you only heard the far-off call of the cuckoo from some distant wood.

At length we reached the old-fashioned and picturesque town, with its quaint and clean streets, its sudden descents, its ancient churches, and its fine old castle. If a stranger wished to see a typical English country town, homely, quiet, and bright, with neither the pestilence of manufactories in the air, nor the vices of fashion visible in the streets, could he do better than visit

Lewes? I had never been to Lewes; but I was proud of it, for Miss Lesley's sake. She, too, was a stranger to the place; and, after she had delivered over the horses to the man to be put up, we started on an exploring expedition. We went down the hilly streets, and through quiet thoroughfares, and out to the precipitous chalk hills which surround the outskirts; then we returned to the Castle, and clambered up the wooded old ruin, where the sunlight was straggling down through the elms and chestnuts. We were the only visitors; and when we had got right up to the top of the tower, we found ourselves alone, for the portly and good-humoured seneschal remained below.

The view from the top of Lewes Castle, as everybody knows, is one of the finest in England; and on this particular day the splendid plain, with its woods and hills

and valleys, lay in the warm sunshine and shone. I think such a view, whether in sunlight or not, is rather saddening—perhaps it was so to me because it so closely resembled that stretch of Buckinghamshire country which was connected in my mind with so many old memories. However, Bonnie Lesley leant on the parapet, and gazed long and wistfully over the great extent of country that lay so peacefully under the summer sky. Suddenly she spoke, and I saw that she had not been dreaming dreams of bygone times.

'Did you think I was very angry when Mr. Heatherleigh tried to stop the horses?'

'Yes.'

'You saw how soon I got over it?'

'Yes.'

'Would you consider that a fault?'

'What, a fault to get rid of anger!

'Yes.'

'I should consider it—and did—a sign of great good-nature.'

'Mr. Heatherleigh would say it was a weakness.'

She turned and said this to me with a show of petulance, and there was a kind of wonder in her eyes.

'I think you mistake Heatherleigh altogether,' I said, 'or else there is a misunderstanding on both sides.'

She laughed.

'Is that a question? There is no mystery between us. He says I am incapable of mystery, among other things.'

'Heatherleigh couldn't say anything so idiotic. Why should anybody want to be mysterious?'

'Perhaps it isn't mystery, entirely, that I mean. But, tell me, you and he are very much alike in your tastes?'

'Very much, indeed.'

'You care for the same sort of people; you have the same notions of things; you have the same sort of nature, in short?'

'Pretty much the same in most things,' I said, 'but very different in others.'

'You like the same sort of people?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'And you said it was a pleasure to you to come with me?'

'You know that it is.'

She laughed again.

You must remember that this was the first 'fine lady' with whom I had ever been privileged to be on any terms of intimacy; and that I found nothing singular or abnormal in her peculiarly frank way of talking. I was not aware that there was a touch of the *Bohémienne* in her manner and conduct. I knew nothing of the extreme restraint that society imposes on the speech and general relations of young and

unmarried folks. I saw that, amongst other people, Bonnie Lesley was as reserved and ceremonious as any; and fancied that there was nothing unusual in her childlike confidence and her self-disclosures, when it had pleased her to break the bounds of formality between herself and me. And this boldness of hers naturally encouraged me to be bold. I did not know that I was sinning against the laws of society, and offending the canons of good taste, in showing her what I thought of her good looks, and in expressing gratitude for her especial favour to myself.

Doubtless she perceived this; and was provoked into exaggerating the licence of her frankness through some notion of the humour of the position. If she encouraged me, my simplicity encouraged her. My ignorance of the customs of good society had produced in me that peculiarity of

which Polly Whistler spoke—I was unable to see why a man and a woman should not be as intimate in their confidences as two women, and I never could teach myself the least embarrassment in speaking honestly to a woman. This much by way of explanation, or excuse, for much that happened then, and will have to be recorded afterwards.

'Will you consider me egotistical,' she continued, 'if I ask you to tell me what you think of me?'

'I daren't,' I said.

'What?' she replied, turning her eyes upon me, with a look of amused surprise in them, 'are you afraid to tell me the truth? And is it because you would have too many cruel things, or too many pretty things, to say to me? But do let me hear what you would say, in any case. I shall not be angry.'

'Well,' I said, 'I think you are very kind.'

She shrugged her shoulders.

'I think you are very courageous and independent in your kindness. For instance, you leave all your friends to come here with me, who am almost a stranger to you, and you make friends with me instead of——'

'All that is nothing,' she said.

'Then you are very amiable.'

'Well?'

'And remarkably good-natured.'

'Well?'

'Very frank.'

'Well?'

Here I stopped, not knowing how to describe her disposition further, whereupon she cried out impatiently—

'Don't you see? That is the very thing. I am amiable, and good-tempered, and kind: is that all you say? Why not say I am

desperately revengeful, or cunning, or passionate, or morose—anything gloomy, and deep, and hideous. He says there is no background to my disposition——'

'And pray who could have said anything so abominable and wrong?' said a new voice, and Heatherleigh appeared at the top of the stairs, and stepped out upon the leaden roof of the tower.

Miss Lesley turned with a start to see who was the speaker, and when she saw who had overheard her, she stamped her foot with an involuntary spasm of vexation. Then she crimsoned deeply, bit her lip, and turned contemptuously away, pretending to look out upon the plain.

'Pray forgive me for breaking in upon you, Miss Lesley,' said Heatherleigh, who seemed rather amused by the scene, 'but I could not help riding after you to see that no danger befell you. Come, don't be angry,

if I interrupted your *tête-à-tête* at an awkward moment—upon my honour, I had no intention of doing so. I have been waiting for you at the foot of the tower for a long time; then I thought I'd be able to point out some objects of interest to you if I came up.'

'You are very kind,' she said, coldly.

'Come, Ted,' he said, 'be my intercessor. Plead for me.'

But Miss Lesley turned round, with a smile breaking through the coldness of her look, and said—

'We will forgive you, if you fulfil your promise. Tell us everything you know about the place.'

Which he did; for he had lived in Lewes, and studied its history and traditions and legends—told us such stories of friars and kings and knights, of battles and sieges and monkish exploits, that the place appeared

to me enchanted. It seemed as though that old and beautiful and picturesque time was divided from us by some thin veil of mist; and that, if we went down there, might it not return to the still, quiet town? How long ago was it that the cold winter days awoke to find the Saxon farm-people overlorded by the fierce and drunken sea-pirates of the north, while Alfred the King and his small court lay hiding in the swamps of Athelney, planning a sudden raid upon them? How long ago was it that Canute, sailing through the yellow sea-fog of the morning, heard the monks of Ely singing, and bade his knights row near the land? The time came quite near to us; English history seemed to be around us; and as we leant upon the old wall and looked down on those fields and mounds into which generation after generation of Saxons and Normans and English had peacefully passed,

there came up to us the slow, soft notes of an organ, which was being played in one of the churches. It was probably only the work of some amateur player, trying over some new chants; but as it reached us—so faintly that we lost it occasionally—it seemed a breath from these old forgotten times, full of mystery and pathos and sadness.

Miss Lesley uttered a slight cry; she had dropped her glove over the wall.

'Jump down for it,' she said to me, 'or shall we all go down? The horses must have rested sufficiently by this time; and that young one especially gets fidgety if he is kept long in strange stables. I hope he won't run away with me.'

'If he were a more intelligent animal, he might be excused,' said Heatherleigh, with a smile.

Bonnie Lesley blushed slightly, and said, rather inappropriately—

'Oh, you think that men are superior to all the other animals?'

'In some things only,' he said. 'As food, for instance, men are inferior to sheep.'

I could not help reflecting what a rejoinder Polly Whistler would have made at this moment. Indeed, I sometimes wished that Miss Lesley, with all her splendid graces and accomplishments, could possess herself of Polly's wit and gay humour and brightness. But would not a perfect woman be a monster? Surely Bonnie Lesley had enough of what was beautiful and desirable in woman.

When we had gone down to the hotel, and ordered the man to get out the horses, Heatherleigh came up to me, and said (Miss Lesley was not within hearing)—

'You can ride, can you not?'

'No; but I can stick on the back of a horse like a leech.'

'Will you ride my horse home, and let me go in the phaeton?'

'Are you tired?'

'No——'

'Then why do you want to exchange?'

'I can't tell you just now——'

'Well, I'd rather go back in the phaeton. You seem not to like Miss Lesley; why should you want to go with her?'

'Very well,' he said, turning away.

There was no look of disappointment or vexation on his face; but there was a meaning in the tone of his voice which I could not understand. Then his anxiety that she and I should not go off together—his sudden appearance at the old castle—this present desire to separate us—what could it all mean?

Was he jealous of the favour which Miss Lesley, in her thoughtless good-nature, was so liberally extending to me? I was irre-

sistibly driven to this conclusion; and my old friend, if he should happen to read these confessions, will understand that I now record the fact with shame.

That notion took possession of me, and by its false light I read all the occurrences which happened at this time. On that very night—after Bonnie Lesley had driven home in time for dinner—Heatherleigh and I dined at a big new restaurant in West Street. He spoke of what had happened at Lewes Castle.

'I only caught the last sentence; but I knew that she had been speaking of what I had said about her, and as I did not wish to hear more, I broke in upon you.'

'Then you did say that?'

'I did, and do. The girl is in many respects a very good sort of creature; but she has no more permanence or depth of character than a sheet of tissue-paper.'

'Her good-nature——'

'Her good-nature is negative. It is the absence of the power to be really angry. She has not depth of nature enough even to feel a proper resentment against anybody or anything. She has no emotional capacity whatever. She admires everything in a pretty and careless way, and admires everything to the same extent. She loves, and hates, and wonders, all in this slight and superficial fashion——'

'For goodness' sake, stop,' I said to him. 'When you begin to talk about Miss Lesley, you lose your reason. What has she done to you, that you should be so savage? And if she is so feeble and frivolous a creature, why were you so anxious to enjoy her society that you rode all the way to Lewes, and why did you want to go back with her in the phaeton?'

He looked at me for a few seconds.

'Yes,' he said, 'you have your troubles to

come; and it doesn't matter which woman it is who opens your eyes. Do you remember when Polly and I were talking nonsense about the necessity of a young artist's having his heart broken?'

'Yes.'

'And I proposed to make Bonnie Lesley the operator in your case.'

'Yes.'

'That was a joke; and I did not think that Bonnie Lesley would have taken the whim that she has taken. But if I were to tell you why the girl is petting you, you—with your sublime faith in the virtue of everybody—would not believe me.'

'Certainly not,' I said, 'if you proposed to tell me that the girl was acting unworthily. Why, it is too absurd. Take your own position—that she is kind to me for some particular purpose of her own; and how does that affect me? I find a warm-

hearted and generous girl, whom everybody (except one) admires; and she chooses to make friends with me, who am too young to be of any importance to her or to anybody else——'

'Younger men than you have run away with pretty girls, and married them—consequently, younger men than you have been led into the notion that they *might* do so, and, finding themselves mistaken, may have had their faith in human nature destroyed and their lives ruined. I warn you, Ted, not to continue your friendship with this girl. I rode out to Lewes to separate you; and I would have ridden as far again: for your sake alone, understand me. Perhaps, as it was, I saved you from a danger that might have befallen you in a few minutes——'

The thought that these words suggested was so fearful and horrible that I started

back from it. I sprang to my feet—my face, I knew, was as white as death, and my heart seemed choking. I said to him—

'You have been my friend, and I am grateful; but, as sure as I live, I will never listen to another word from your lips.'

I rushed out of the place: he followed, but he had to stop for a moment or two to explain to the waiter. This saved me. I walked about all night; and took the first train in the morning for London.

## CHAPTER X.

### POLLY AND HE.

I WAS hasty enough, I know; but I was beside myself with indignation. For Heatherleigh to talk of my losing faith in human nature through some possible underhand dealing on the part of Miss Lesley seemed absurd when I considered that he, without any proof, or reason, or excuse, suggested about an honest and good-hearted girl what his words dared not state explicitly. What danger?—and to me! Why, so great was my sense of that beautiful creature's bounty in even regarding me and speaking to me, that I should have been only too willing to suffer anything to give her a moment's plea-

sure. And it was out of the question that any suffering of mine could affect her in any way. Suppose she was one of those impossible women who are supposed to go about the world in order to imperil men's souls by breaking their hearts—suppose she liked to boast of conquests as a savage points to the number of his scalps, was it likely she would care to make a conquest of me? There were a dozen men in Brighton at that time anxious to have the honour of being her victims. They hovered round her, knowing that all of them could not marry her, and certain that all, except some particular one, must be disappointed. To catch a smile, or a word, or the pleasure of handing her a fan, they sought her society at this risk; and it was not to be considered that she should turn aside from these suitors, who had every advantage of age and position and money, to me, as one likely to flirt with or make love

to her. Why she should in any case have shown me such favour was sufficient of a mystery; and it was explicable only on the ground of her disinterested good-nature and that independence of kindness which I had observed in her.

As I was going up Hampstead Road to my lodgings, on the morning of my hurried departure from Brighton, I met Polly Whistler. I shook hands with her heartily; for I was glad to see some face that I knew. It was my first estrangement from Heatherleigh; and all the world seemed to have grown cold and distrustful.

'What are you doing here, Ted?' she said.

'I should like to tell you, Polly; but it is a long story. Where are you going?'

'I was to sit to Mr. Frances at ten o'clock, in place of that Italian girl—only for the costume, you know. I don't look like an

Italian peasant-girl, do I? However, come along with me, and I will tell him I can't sit for him this morning. He must wait for her until to-morrow. Then we can take a walk in Regent's Park, and you will tell me all about it.'

'But you will lose the sitting,' I suggested.

'I don't care now,' she said, rather sadly. 'I used to like to gather a few shillings, you know, and buy little things for the house; but my mother——.'

I understood the mother not only took the girl's earnings, but sold such little ornaments or luxuries as she chose to buy. So Polly and I went round to Regent's Park; and I told her the whole story. She was deeply interested in it.

'And do you think he is in love with her?' she asked, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

'No,' I said, 'I can't say that. A man would not talk about a woman in that way if he was in love with her.'

Polly was very thoughtful for some time. We sat down on one of the benches underneath the great lime-trees fronting the broad stretch of the park that lies south of the Zoological Gardens. It was here that I had first seen Bonnie Lesley. There were few people in the park at this time; and an unusual silence dwelt around, for the leaves of the trees scarcely stirred in the warm sunlight.

'You think he would not talk like that if he was in love with her?' said Polly. 'Did you never imagine the position of a man who is compelled, in spite of himself, to love a girl whom he considers unworthy of his love? Don't you think he would be bitter against her, and bitterer against himself? Would he not be likely to laugh at the folly

of being in love; and sneer at those feminine arts by which he had been captivated? Would he not revenge himself in that way, and cover his own weakness, of which he is ashamed?'

It seemed to me that this bright and happy girl must have had her moments of cruel and sad reflection before she could have hit upon a notion like that, the truth of which flashed upon me at once. But was such the position of Heatherleigh?

'Come,' she said, with a laugh, 'what have you and I to do with love-matters, Ted? They are for rich people, who have nothing to do but choose whom they will marry. We have our living to look after; and it takes us all our time, doesn't it? I wonder if, in the next world, we shall be able to get free of all these things, and speak to each other of what might have been here below? It would be like a

Sunday out for us poor people, if we were to get such a chance. There—will you look at this thing, that I copied the other night?'

With a sort of assumed carelessness, she slipped into my hand a bit of paper, which I unfolded. There were some verses on it, written in her own handwriting, which I knew. It was very correct and precise, but a trifle stiff: she had taught herself.

The verses, so far as I can remember, began with these lines—

> 'If you and I were only ghosts,
> Cut off from human cares and pains,
> To walk together, at dead of night,
> Along the far sidereal plains—'

and went on to say how they would forget all the cruel conditions that had separated them here on earth, and talk to each other of all they had been thinking when these things had kept them asunder. Indeed, the

lines, touchingly pathetic here, and awkwardly constructed there, were so obviously a reproduction of what she had been saying, that I cried out—

'Oh, Polly, you have been writing poetry!'

'Nonsense!' she said, with an embarrassment and blushing I had never seen her exhibit. 'I told you I had copied it.'

'And you told me a fib.'

She put her arm inside mine (she had slipped the paper into her pocket meanwhile), and said—

'Come, let us go into the gardens. I have got a shilling, if you have. And you shall tell me of all you mean to do. I insist first, though, on your making friends with Mr. Heatherleigh.'

We passed into the Zoological Gardens, and we strolled about the walks, sometimes talking about Heatherleigh and Bonnie Lesley, sometimes talking about the animals in

the cages. Polly was in better spirits now; and went on chatting in her usual bright and happy fashion. I wish I could remember a tithe of the remarks she made about the animals—mad interpretations of their feelings and opinions, humorous touches of description, and comical comparisons of every kind. From cage to cage we went, from enclosure to enclosure, and there was scarcely a bird or beast that she did not endow with human feelings, and wonder what each was thinking of at the time. Some of these anthropomorphic fancies were extraordinarily ingenious, and they flowed out so freely and spontaneously as to charm one with their constant variety and novelty. She had just described the opinion probably held by a very mangy-looking hyæna, about Offenbach's music, as played by the band of the Coldstream Guards opposite its cage, when her arm, which was inside mine

gave a sudden start. Heatherleigh approached.

The expression of her face changed instantly; and she seemed anxious to get away without speaking. However, he came up, and shook hands with her, and asked, in his old friendly way, how she was. She answered him very coldly; and, saying that he probably wanted to speak to me, was for going off by herself.

'Don't go away like that, Polly,' said he.

'At least let me go with you,' said I.

'There now,' he said, with a peculiar smile, 'are my two best friends—about the only people I care for—in league against me, and going to cut me! Have I deserved it? At any rate tell me what I am accused of.'

'I don't accuse you of anything, Mr. Heatherleigh,' said Polly, in a low voice, 'but I wish to go home.'

He looked at her for a moment with a strange look in his face—a look of infinite compassion and tenderness. I thought he would have seized her hand. But he only said, in a graver voice—

'Don't let any misunderstanding remain between us three. Life is not long enough that we should waste it in quarrels; and friends are not so plentiful that we can afford to throw them off. Let us sit down on this seat. There now. As for you, Ted, I will bring you to your senses in a moment. You misunderstood entirely what I meant about Miss Lesley. But say that you didn't; and I profess myself all the same very sorry, and I will never say anything against her again. It was entirely for your sake that I spoke: you will find that out some day, when you know both her and me better. I say that I regret having said what I did: will that do?'

I nodded.

'Shall we be friends, then?'

'Certainly; I don't see how we could have been anything else under any circumstances. But your conduct towards her is a mystery to me. You say that some day I shall think otherwise about her. You don't suppose I am in love with her? But, so far as I do know her, I know you do her a great injustice, and last night what you said was simply——'

'There, there,' he said, 'we'll have no more about that. I regret it; and you will think no more about it. Is it a bargain?'

'I am only too glad to be friends with you again on any terms; but it is you who will think otherwise in time—unless your present opinion of her is only a pretence.'

'And now for you, Polly; what have I done to you that you should try to avoid me?'

'Nothing at all, Mr. Heatherleigh,' said

Polly, casting down her eyes, 'and you know it.'

'Why you used to be as frank with me as the daylight, Polly,' he said. 'When I came round the park in search of Ted, and when young Cartwright, who saw you both, told me you had come in here, I said to myself that I should have an ally in bringing him to reason. Instead of which I have both of you to argue with; and the mischief is that I don't know what it is we have to argue about. *You* are not in love with Bonnie Lesley, Polly?'

'No.'

'Then what is the matter?'

'You forget how we parted last,' she said, in a low voice.

'But what has that to do with me?' he said, taking her hand.

She drew her hand away, and said—

'It has nothing to do with you, Mr.

Heatherleigh, of course, but—but I don't wish you to speak to me any more——'

She hastily rose from her seat, and left, with her back turned to us. He would have followed her; but I restrained him.

'Don't shame her any more,' I said, 'she is crying.'

He bit his lip, and sat silent for a moment.

'That old idiot!' he muttered; 'why should her nonsense be regarded by us who are sane?'

'By-and-by Polly will have forgotten much of what her mother said, and may not be ashamed to meet you; but at present——'

'Well, at present?' he said; 'wasn't she chatting just as usual to you when I came up?'

'That is another matter,' I said, looking hard at him.

He did not seem to draw any inference from the words: he was staring at the path, and drawing lines on the gravel with his stick. Eventually I persuaded him to go over to his rooms, saying that I would follow him.

Then I went in search of Polly, and found her.

'Is he gone?' she asked.

'Yes,' I said.

She pressed my hand; and we went slowly towards the gate, without a word.

'Really,' I said to her, in crossing over the park, on our way home, 'you put too much importance on what passed that night. Heatherleigh understands that your mother did not know what she was saying; and he is very sorry that it should have occurred, and is vexed that it should alter in any way our old relations. Don't you remember the jolly evenings, Polly, when we three used

to sit all by ourselves after supper, and chat until near midnight? You know, the autumn nights will be coming on again; what shall we do with ourselves if we are never to meet as we used to do?

'You are very kind, Ted,' she said, 'but that is all over.'

'It isn't all over, Polly. When Heatherleigh finally comes back from Brighton——'

'Do you think I can ever enter his house again, considering how I left it?' she said. with just a touch of indignation in her voice. 'Do you think a woman has no sort of self-respect, even although she is a model? Oh, I hope I shall never, never see him again—for it kills me to think of his standing in that room and listening to all the cruel things she said of me.'

I saw her mouth quivering, and her breath came short and quick. Then she said—

'You told me you had a picture at your lodgings, Ted.'

'Yes.'

'Could I—could I be of any use to you? We are both poor, you know—at least I am; but I have plenty of time, and I should like to come and sit for you. Will you let me do that in return for your kindness?'

'But why should you cry about it, Polly?' said I.

The tears were streaming down the poor girl's cheeks. As we passed along, I knew that Heatherleigh was watching us from under the shadow of one of the trees; but she did not see him.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. ALFRED BURNHAM.

I WENT down to Brighton again with Heatherleigh, and re-entered that strange world of indolent enjoyment, of luxury and gaiety, of day-dreaming by the sea, of listening to Bonnie Lesley's pretty voice and looking at the pretty wonder of her child-like eyes.

What chiefly astonished me in this new world, was the life led by the young men—the young Olympians of handsome figure, of faultless dress and unlimited command of money, who drove their mail-phaetons in such splendid style, and had such a fine indifference to the presence of waiters.

Rather against my will, I was dragged into their society by Heatherleigh, who knew several of them who were living at various hotels. So far as I was concerned, I could not help admiring the free and easy manner with which they used to try to convince me that I was their equal. I was too much impressed by their manner of living, however, to think of myself in the matter: it was enough for me to watch the actions of those young favourites of fortune, with their irresistible coolness and self-possession, and their unconscionable expenditure in flowers, gloves, and cigars. How little they thought of tossing up as to who should pay for a dinner for four or five of them, which cost, at a moderate computation, eighteen shillings a head! How carelessly they would hand a half-sovereign to the leader of the band which used to play in front of the hotel at night! With what indifference they

wrote off to Poole to send them down a couple of suits of clothes! And with what a royal magnanimity they dispensed shillings and half-crowns to anybody who did them the smallest service!

There was one among them who was never guilty of these thoughtless acts of generosity or extravagance; and that was Mr. Alfred Burnham. Miss Hester Burnham, I heard, had come down, and was living with her aunt—an old lady who had a large house at the extreme east end of Brighton. This lady I had never seen; but I knew she was not very favourably disposed either to her nephew, Mr. Alfred Burnham, or to his father and her brother-in-law, Colonel Burnham. Such, at least, was the gossip down in Buckinghamshire, and it was so far corroborated by the fact that Mr. Alfred Burnham, instead of living at her house, stayed at an hotel.

I detested that man, and everything I saw and heard of him at Brighton increased the bad impression I received from his cold and calculating eyes, his thin lips, and selfish, hard face. He was handsome enough, in one way—indeed, he looked like the best type of young Englishman, with the emotional and moral qualities withdrawn. He had a good physique, good complexion, and excellent manners, of a somewhat indifferent and *blasé* kind. To women he could be exceedingly agreeable, when he chose; and then he would turn away, with a half-concealed look of weariness, as if he rather pitied their folly in being pleasant to him. In the company of men, he was chiefly remarkable for his constantly watchful habit of making the most of current circumstances—of winning bets, and extricating himself from the necessity of paying anything. He did not seem to care to shine in

any way. He never boasted of anything—not even of his successes with women. He acknowledged himself ignorant of politics; was rather inclined to be a Conservative, as he considered the Radicals 'such a pack of d——d cads;' he hunted sometimes, but he had no good runs or exciting escapes to recount; he shot sometimes, but cared nothing about it.

Here is a little incident which I used to think revealed his nature admirably.

He and two or three others, with Heatherleigh and myself, were going into the Grand Hotel. I may say here, *par parenthèse*, that I had no scruple about meeting *him*. I did not care whether he remembered or not that he had given me half-a-crown by way of alms. I disliked him, and, had there been any disposition on his part to recall that incident at the foot of White-cross Hill, I should not have been

ashamed of it in *his* presence. As it was, he made no difference between me and the others, except that he never tried to make bets with me.

As we were going up the steps, I saw him linger behind, and drop a stone on to the ground. I could not understand why a man should have been carrying a stone in his pocket, but paid no particular attention to the fact. We went into the billiard-room, somebody having proposed that there should be a game of pool before lunch. Some played, others looked on, and bet upon who should divide. I happened to sit down beside a young barrister, with whom I had become acquainted.

'I fancy you noticed Burnham drop a stone as we came in,' said he to me.

'I did.'

'Come out with me, and we'll have a lark.'

We left the billiard-room together, and when we got outside, he picked up the stone which Alfred Burnham had dropped.

'Now,' said he, 'he's up to some trick. He means to bet about that stone—either the distance it lies from the pavement, or its weight, or something like that. He's always at it; and he's not above trying any sort of dodge if he thinks he can get a fiver out of you. Suppose that we get a bit of string and measure how far the stone lies from the pavement, and then we can have it weighed?'

He put the stone down again, and we accurately measured the distance. Then we went into the tobacconist's shop at the corner and had the stone weighed—seven ounces thirteen drams was the result. Finally the stone was put back in its place, and we returned to the billiard-room.

Burnham was in high spirits; he had won a

sovereign, betting three to one that Heatherleigh would divide the last pool. He offered to toss double or quits; but the offer was declined.

We went into the room in which luncheon had been prepared for us; and sat down at the prettily decorated table, with its coloured claret-glasses, its vases of flowers, and — not least attractive — its handsome wine-coolers, out of which the rounded heads and golden necks of two champagne-bottles peeped. And out there the gay crowd rolled past in its handsome carriages, and there was a glow of brilliantly tinted parasols, and bonnets and dresses, along the pavement; and then, out beyond that again, lay the great white sea, and the sunlight, and the far-off specks of sails.

Heatherleigh was sitting next me, and I begged him to tell me whose guest I was.

'I don't know,' he said; 'it doesn't matter.'

'Don't you know whose wine you are drinking?'

'I believe a person of the name of Röderer is the excellent author of it. Don't distress yourself. We were hustled in here indiscriminately by two or three men, and if there is any one of them whose bread and salt you would rather not eat, we shall forbid his paying his share. Have an honest care of your stomach, Ted; and leave Alfred Burnham alone.'

'I wasn't talking of Alfred Burnham,' I said.

'No, but you were thinking of him, when you asked that question. There is old Ebury, at the end of the table, preaching about the benefits to civilisation that the Italian canal, in which he is a shareholder, is going to produce. He may talk about the Italian canal till Doomsday; but it is his own intestinal canal he is thinking of.'

At this moment I overheard Mr. Alfred Burnham beginning to talk rather loudly about the fun of making absolutely absurd bets.

'Why do you treat Alfred Burnham so defiantly—so cavilierly,' continued Heatherleigh. 'Has he done you any injury? Why, you speak to him as if he were a beggar——'

'That is *my* rôle,' I said, laughing.

'Ah, I remember,' said Heatherleigh. 'But you don't blame him for that?'

'I don't blame him for anything—I dislike him; and I shouldn't eat or drink a morsel or drop at this table if I thought he was going to pay for it.'

'Be at rest on that score, Ted; Alfred Burnham never pays. It is a point of honour with him; and I am glad there is one thing on which he follows a principle.'

Burnham was now engaging the attention

of the men nearest him by describing the various bets he had seen made. The running of rain-drops on panes, the motions of flies, the chasing of waves—anything in which no possible calculation could be made he preferred.

'For instance,' he said, getting up and holding his table-napkin in his hand (although lunch was not nearly over), 'I shouldn't mind having a bet about the weight of anything lying out there — a stone, or a bit of dry stick.'

With that he looked out of the window.

'Are you good at guessing right?' asked my friend, the barrister, whose name was Tilley.

'I take my chance, like everybody else,' said Burnham. 'For example, I will bet you anything you like that I will go nearer the weight of that stone lying out there than you will.'

'Sit down, you fellows, and drop your betting,' said some one.

Burnham, however, ordered the waiter to go out and fetch in this particular stone. He brought it, and it was handed to Tilley.

'I don't mind having a bet with you,' said he.

'What shall it be?' returned Burnham, carelessly. 'Ten, twenty, fifty, a hundred?'

'Anything you like—say fifty.'

'All right.'

By this time everybody at table was listening.

'Send it off to be weighed,' said Tilley, 'and make the waiter bring back the weight on a bit of paper. You and I must write down our notion of the weight, and hand the two slips to Heatherleigh.'

'Very well,' said Burnham, with a laugh. 'I suppose we must be particular when fifty

pounds are in the case. Or, what do you say, shall we double?'

'I don't mind.'

A minute or two afterwards, the waiter returned, and gave Heatherleigh the third slip of paper.

'I find,' said Heatherleigh, speaking with official gravity, 'that Burnham guesses the weight of this interesting piece of stone at eight ounces, which is a very near guess, as it weighs seven ounces thirteen drams. But I find that Tilley is even nearer; *for he guesses it at seven ounces thirteen drams.* Accordingly, he has won the bet.'

Heatherleigh must have seen through the whole affair when Tilley's paper was handed to him; but he made the announcement quite gravely. It was received by the others with an explosion of laughter. Burnham was beside himself with rage; for not only had he lost the money, but he saw

that his neighbours perceived he had been caught in his own trap. He tried to laugh and said to Tilley—

'You think that a good joke?'

'Well, I do,' said Tilley, who was laughing heartily.

'I'll tell you what I think,' shouted Burnham, entirely losing command of himself, 'I think you are a d——d swindler.'

Tilley was about to drink some claret out of a tumbler. The next second the wine was thrown into Burnham's face. Then ensued a pretty scrimmage, two or three men holding Burnham back by main force, and everybody begging everybody else to be quiet. Tilley stood calm and collected at the table. At length, Burnham, vowing unheard-of things, was persuaded to go to his bed-room, and change his stained waistcoat; while Tilley sat down, and asked if anybody was willing to cash Mr. Alfred

Burnham's note of hand for a hundred pounds.

'I will—when you get it,' said his neighbour.

Burnham did not re-appear; and Tilley—who made no secret of the way in which he had trapped his opponent—finished his lunch in peace. From that day, I noticed that the men rather fought shy of Mr. Alfred Burnham. When, through habit, he offered to bet, they declined.

'Lucky for him the Lewisons have not heard of that prank?' said Heatherleigh to me.

'Why?'

'Because he would not be allowed to visit there, and it is only there he has a chance of meeting your friend, Miss Hester.'

'Then you think——'

'That he means to become an honest man so soon as he can marry her and get her

money to live upon. They say these two are engaged.'

Heatherleigh was silent for a long time.

'She reminds me so much sometimes of that girl—whom—whom I told you I used to know. She has the same sort of manner, and her eyes have the same strange expression. Sometimes I look at her and think that—— Bah! nonsense! What is she if she is capable of thinking of marrying *him*?'

## CHAPTER XII.

### AT SHOREHAM.

SOME local club or society having resolved to hold its annual fête at the Swiss Gardens, Shoreham, Mr. Lewison, who knew several of the members, was asked to form a party to go there. He accordingly did so; and Heatherleigh and I were among the number invited. Some started from Mr. Lewison's house; others drove over by themselves, in their own carriages. Among the former were Heatherleigh and myself, and, as the party was successively told off, it happened that we were ordered to accompany Miss Lesley.

It was a very pleasant morning, with a

cool breeze blowing in from the sea that tempered the fierce heat of the sunlight. Miss Lesley was looking particularly handsome; and she was particularly gracious. Even Heatherleigh's coldness seemed to be thawed by her obvious desire to be pleasant and friendly; and he chatted with her in a better-tempered fashion than I had ever seen him exhibit towards her. Once or twice, however, when he happened to say something to me about painting or poetry, or some similar topic, and when she joined the conversation, he turned to her with a polite and cold attention, which plainly said, 'I don't choose to have *you* talk on such subjects.'

This was unfair; because again and again I had noticed in the girl a desire to appreciate and understand these things, which deserved every encouragement. I have already said that it seemed to me the

artistic side of her nature was singularly unimpressionable—that she seemed incapable of receiving artistic influences; but surely it was all the more creditable to her that she should be anxious to be able to take an interest in such matters. Even to assume the interest she did not feel was in itself a virtue. Most women in her position would have used the prerogative given them by their surpassing loveliness to despise what they could not comprehend, and banish any mention of it from their circle. To hold in subjection a court of lovers, to look like some glorified Cleopatra, would have been sufficient for them; and they would have laughed at and scouted the intellectual cravings which they could not understand, even as modern interpretation will have it that the object of Pygmalion's love outraged and disappointed the passionate longings of her creator.

When we reached Shoreham, we found that a number of people had arrived, and had already become familiar with what must have been to them the very novel amusements of the gardens. Here some young girls in gauzy white, with red roses in their hair, and pink gloves on their hands, were practising archery in a reckless fashion, and getting extraordinary compliments from one or two gentlemen who were their attendants, whenever chance brought a stray arrow near the target. There a party was playing at croquet, and exhibiting to bystanders a much greater skill in the fine art of flirtation than in sending a ball through the bell. Then there were the quiet walks through snatches of copsewood (with some painted pasteboard figure suddenly staring at you from among the bushes) the greenhouses, the flower-gardens, the lake, and what not, to attract straggling couples. I do

not mean here to describe the various amusements that occupied us during the day —a picnic on the lawn being prominent among them; nor yet the performance at the theatre, where Miss Lesley sat in the front of the gallery, and endeavoured to keep her numerous gentlemen-friends from talking to her while the actors were on the stage. As the people were going out, we happened to get together; and, as chance would have it, we carelessly strolled onwards until we found ourselves in that straggling line of wood which surrounds the lake.

Here we walked up and down in the cool of the beautiful evening, all around us the flutter of green leaves and the stirring of the sweet pure air; and then, when we came to a gap in the trees, we found a pale yellow sky overhead, sharply traced across with lines of cirrous clouds, gleaming like silver on the faint back-

ground of gold mist. The young moon was there, too; and Bonnie Lesley turned over all the money in her pocket, for luck's sake.

'You artists don't care to be rich,' she said. 'You have a world of your own, and you are rich in dreams, and you don't care about us poor folks out here, or what we think is pleasant to have.'

'I know what is pleasant to have,' I said. 'I wish I was rich, and beautiful, and strong and happy, not for my own sake, but to have the power of conferring favour and pleasure. I see men and women here who have only to smile to confer a favour:—you, yourself—you know what pleasure it must give you to be beautiful and bountiful and loveable—to be able to gladden the people around you with a look or a word.

'Do you know what you are saying?' she said, with a laugh of surprise.

It seemed to me that I did not. I was so anxious to show her what I considered the happy position of rich and beautiful persons, that I had taken no care to conceal what I thought of herself personally. This I told her, frankly.

'You think it is a fine thing to be good-looking and all this that you say? What if you can't please the very people you want to please? Why, if I were to believe the nonsense you talked, I should be able at once to overwhelm you with kindness.'

'You do that now,' I said, truthfully enough.

'Is what you say true?' she said, turning her large eyes, full of a pretty astonishment, upon me. 'Is it really of any concern to you that I should do everything in my power to please you? If I told you now that—that there was nothing I wouldn't do——'

With that she laughed lightly.

'Come,' she said, 'we are drifting into confessions, and there are sure to be people walking round this way, who would imagine——'

And here she laughed again, and turned away from me, and tripped down the bank to the margin of the lake. Before I knew what she was about, she had jumped into a boat, and lifting one of the oars, had pushed out from the bank.

'How far would you jump in order to have the pleasure of coming and talking to me?' she said.

'Let the boat stop where it is, and I will jump from the bridge.'

'You silly boy, you would break your neck. See, I will be merciful, and you shall break your neck for me another time.'

'When I can be of service to you.'

'Just so.'

She pushed the stern of the boat towards the shore; I got in and took the oars. We paddled about a little — passed under the bridge, and out upon the larger lake, which was now growing crimson under the evening sky. Out in the middle of the water, we allowed the boat to float idly, and Bonnie Lesley bade me come and sit beside her, that she might talk to me.

'Whatever put that strange notion into your head about wishing to be rich and, so forth, in order to be able to please people? The only use in riches I see, is that they make you independent. For instance, if I had no money, I should have to marry a man who could keep up a house in a certain style; but I shall have a little money, you know, when I come of age, and I can look all round my friends and say to myself, 'Well, there are one or two who, I think, would like to marry me, but I shall wait until I get desperately fond of

some one, and then, if he is as fond of me, I can marry him, even although he is a beggar. Now that is fortunate.'

'It would be, for the beggar.'

'Why not for me? Surely you have a better opinion of me than to think that I have any sympathy with the common notions about marriage? Oh, I am more romantic than you imagine, and if you would only try me—I mean if you would not misunderstand me, I might—— But no matter. Do you remember what Queen Elizabeth wrote in reply to Sir Walter Raleigh's lines about his fearing to rise so far lest he might fall? She was right, too, was she not? Isn't it the business of men to dare, and of women to give?' She uttered these last words in a low voice, with her head bent down.

Inadvertently I took her hand in mine, and she did not withdraw it.

The boat, meanwhile, had drifted back almost to the bridge, and, at this moment, I looked up and saw Hester Burnham standing there, alone. Her eyes met mine.

Did I ever tell you what those eyes were like — the large, dark pupils, set in the tender-blue grey, and shaded by long eyelashes—eyes full of a strange intense life, that was yet tempered by the calm, wise, kind expression of them?

I met that earnest look for a moment, and I withdrew my hand from Bonnie Lesley's fingers. I knew that between me and her, between me and any possibility of such hope and happiness as I had dared to think she suggested, there lay something as wide, and as sad, as the sea.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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